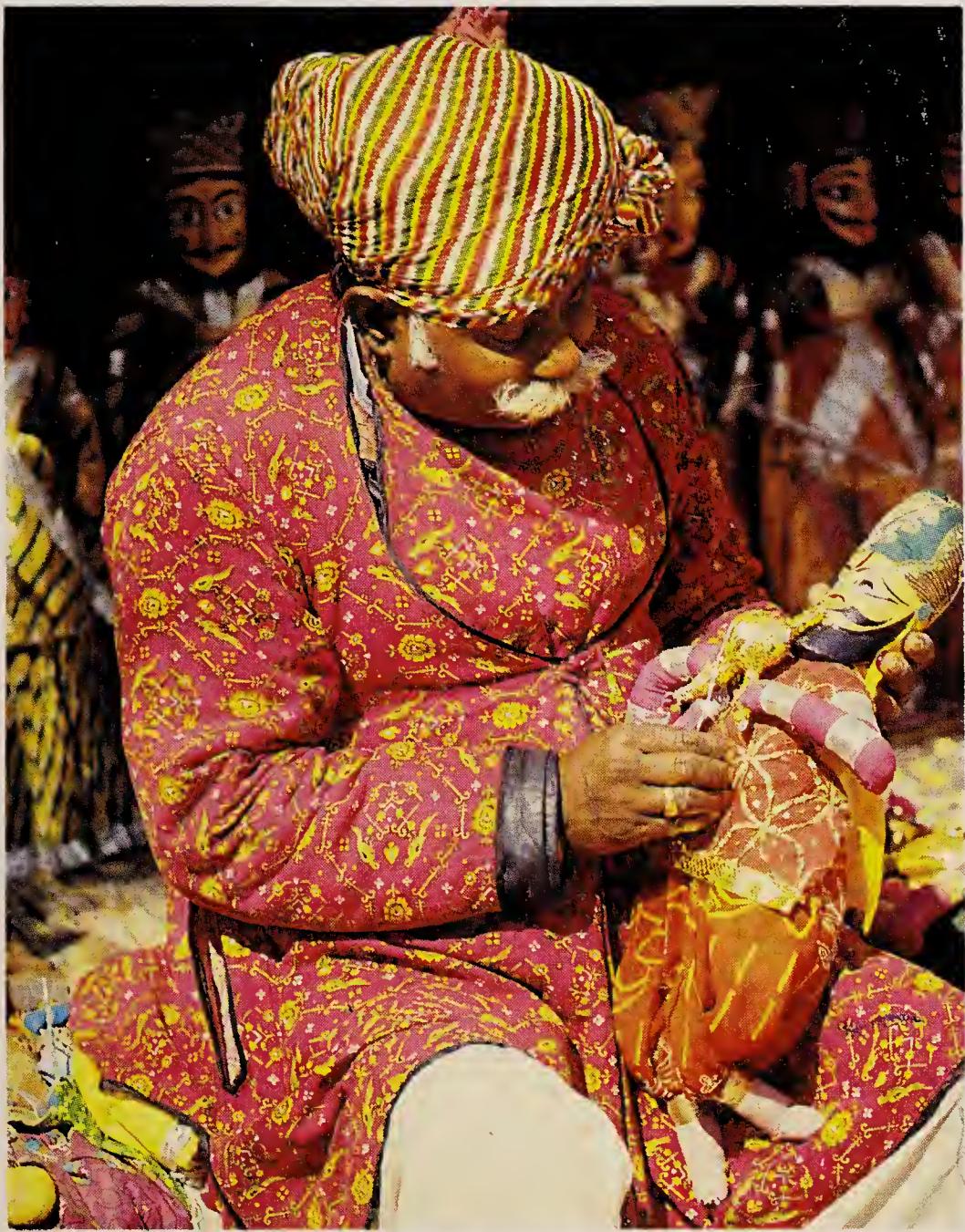


INDIA'S CRAFT TRADITION

KAMALADEVI CHATTOPADHYAY



PUBLICATIONS DIVISION



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INDIA'S CRAFT TRADITION

Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay



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PREFACE

This is not a book on Indian crafts or their origin and development. This is an attempt to seek the origin of 'master-craftsmanship', how this concept first came to be, before it was built up into a way of life in India. True master-craftsmanship is not peculiar to India. But normally it relates to a physical function, a manual performance. But nowhere were the people made aware that this spark of a dynamo was within us to be brought out and woven into our life through an elaborate mosaic as it were, as was done in this country. Visionaries from time to time have tried to remind mankind not to lose this essence of life—what the Indians called *rasa*, and what in modern parlance is referred to as 'quality'. Morrison, Ruskin, Tolstoy, Emerson in the West, each in his own way, according to his own light, Hamada, Inagi, Tagore, Gandhiji in the Orient, pleaded for this element, the element of excellence in life. The very basic values that constitute this are different. They are not to be assessed by the cost of materials possessed, their weight or size, nor measured by the mere volume of knowledge acquired.

There is a different force at work where man is creating something beautiful for himself, for the household : purposeful, but non-commercial. It is this that has impelled the tribals to gain mastery over their workmanship and produce superb things. The joy of creating with single-minded concentration and infinite patience to bring their effort to perfection, resulted in the wealth of beauty in their life.

This book is not meant to be a study and therefore avoids footnotes and authoritative quotations. The references to ancient texts are to show how this concept of quality was pursued over the centuries, relentlessly, to use a harsh term, and stressed as most crucial in shaping our life style.

Today when sensitive and thinking beings the world over are bemoaning the loss of this quality in life, hankering for it, when telling books are produced as illustrations in homely similes like fixing a motor cycle part or the social significance

of using an old-fashioned lawn mower, one senses the realisation that great truths are only sustained through the fine quality in the little everyday things of life.

Handicrafts are valuable not merely as a beautiful heritage, but because we need to live with them, touch them, feel them, use them, have intimate communion with them, so that our life is enriched by their grace.

India is old in experience, but young in modernity, mature yet naive. Though we have inherited incalculable treasures, material and intellectual, we remain incalculably poor. The progress we boast of seems at times non-descript when we take a hard look at ourselves. There is an inversion of values, rather superficial, when we wander away from our roots. The high prestige placed on power has provoked imitation, which may be meritorious but uninspiring.

What we seek today is not a repetition of the old pattern, be it Indian or colonial, but a positive contribution to strengthening the quality of current life. The sterility of our higher education can be more impoverishing than the absence of elementary education amongst a people who still possess some of the deep oral culture. This makes ours a land of the cultivated illiterate and the uncultivated educated.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

INDIA HAS BEEN known as a land of Crafts and Craftsmen. An ancient chronicler of centuries gone by writes: 'One finds long established industries of the Indian peninsula asserting their excellence in a manner at once characteristic and extraordinary. The same skill is seen in metals, in ivory carving, pottery, mosaics, shawls, muslins, carpets, an excellence attained by these ingenious communities ages and ages ago, and still practising them.' Traditional *Craftsmanship* in our country has meant far more than skill with materials, more than manual dexterity in manipulating tools. It has meant a total operation involving the emotions, mind, body and the vibrant rhythm that such a co-ordination generates.

The question posed is : How came this concept of 'master craftsmanship'—mastery in the creation of crafts. What are quality and excellence, the indispensable attributes of 'master-craftsmanship'.

Craftsmanship has always been a basic activity in human society, in fact it is considered more cohesive and permeating in human relationships than even language, for it can penetrate the normal barriers to communication. Particularly has this been true of the older societies such as those in Asia, South and Central America, Africa where certain aspects of the ancient handed down cultures still continue to produce powerful impressions that are almost ageless.

The growth of crafts in society was the sign of the cultivation of sensitivity and the stirring and mellowing of humanism. It stood for man's endeavour to bring elegance and grace into an otherwise harsh and drab human existence. In fact, man's elevation from the gross animal existence is marked by his yearning for something beyond the satisfaction of mere creature comforts and needs, which found natural expression in

crafts.

The most primitive people began to ornament their articles of everyday use, later weapons, then their garments and their own person and surroundings. The rough and severe walls of their huts became canvasses on which blossomed pictures. A death-dealing but very strategic item like the bow and arrow became embellished with decorations, water pots took pleasing shapes and alluring designs were invented for mundane kitchen pans, coverings and trappings for animals, ornamentation of even ordinary carts.

Here we see the transformation of the mere functional into works of aesthetic value, the common becoming the cherished, the joy giving. Utility is the necessary part in the completeness of life. Through aesthetics in utility, beauty is brought into our intimate life.

India has over the ages built up a complex philosophy to define and interpret these concepts. Yet if one probes back into the remotest caverns of time, these attributes seem to have taken shape even as man has grown from the earliest times. Obviously craftsmanship emerged and unfolded itself in the peace and fulgence of the countryside where the community living in close intimacy with nature, with its many splendoured mien and in tune with its changing rhythms of the day, of the night, the varying seasons and the life-cycles, evolved a culture of its own in harmony with the environment. The seasonal observances through festivals were a sign of their awareness of the wonder of nature's transformation and to transcend the petty routines of everyday life. Its social content was a fabric woven out of the million tinted strands of local romances and heroic tales, from the core and substance of their everyday life mingled with vibrant memories transformed into myths and fables, songs and verses, and not the least out of nature's own rich storehouse.

Each community lived an integrated pattern of life that responded to the joys and burdens of life, taking them in its flow. There was a natural acceptance of the human cycle like embracing the air and the sunlight, with no resort to escapism. Craftsmanship was thus conceived and nurtured in an embryo of fullness generated by an unhurried rhythm of life. Such

products naturally had vitality and character for they were the direct expression of man's creativity, but with a purposeful emphasis on the functional, endowing it with beauty. Craftsmanship was therefore an indigenous creation of the ordinary people to meet their direct human needs. An illustration cited is that satisfaction in eating calls as much for the right kind of spoon as the food to be consumed. This genesis accepted man's intimate kinship with and understanding of the human urges that create the needs. It also proved an intuitive sense of going with, rather than against, the grain of daily existence. Craftsmanship became an activity that involved the entire person, closely relating the mind and the material to a certain function for a specific purpose. There was no professional caste or class of craftsmen or women. Each was a maker and creator.

It is obvious that man developed a sense of aesthetics from the pleasure he derived from a job well done. He must have imbibed a deep sense of fulfilment when he looked on his handiwork. He satisfied, unconsciously may be, but with the right instinct, all the conditions demanded later through learned treatises of what constituted master-craftsmanship. This was not determined merely by the outer appearance of an object. It had to be a human activity that fulfilled a definite function, had a place in a social pattern, for man is a part of a social milieu. Therefore, the tangible forms he shaped were meaningful and led to the maker transcending himself and getting transformed into an artist, that is, a creator. This accounts for the superb handiwork of the tribals, the result of an unobscured imagination, extreme concern for details, sincere devotion to objectives, all of which generates powerful inspiration and endows the object with quality. But this was not the offspring of a philosophy nor lessons learnt from learned treatises, guide books or texts.

Here one needs to define quality in this context, for it would go beyond the normal dictionary meaning.

One gazes with wonder on the objects the tribals turn out. The textile designs range from the most delicate and suggestive to the most elaborate manifestation of complex techniques. The basketry is most exquisite, with incredibly refined weave

and in a wealth of beautiful shapes and designs. The wood carvings are startlingly alive.

Tribals decorate themselves and almost everything about them. The boards in the frontage of their houses have carved human heads in high relief. Similarly doors, eaves in the roof, drums and musical instruments, the couch on which the dead is laid out (in fact this has some of the most elaborate carving), graves of famous warriors; items of household use like mugs, plates, pipes for smoking, combs, etc.

In fact their products vibrate with life, as though the maker infused some of his own self into his creation. Each has to be a craftsman to be a creator, for when he shapes his object he is in a way shaping his own personality. Here there is no duality of the subjective and the objective. Creation is a self-involved experience, of basic oneness of the personality which later came to be described as *sadhana* by the Aryans in their treatises, a cultivated state of being. The tribal did not probe or delve into his self to build up the complex analytical philosophy that others were later to contrive. The tribals' intuitive mode was primarily inspirational, and they seem to have been guided by an aesthetic conscience, to coin an explanatory phrase. For his mental exercises were simple and direct. Continuing to be an intimate child of nature, he was conditioned to following certain natural laws, which taught techniques and guided processes, sensitivity to right proportions and balances which nature so exuberently portrays, and sharpens sensibilities that make for economy in material and operational time.

Ancient man must have learned in the infancy of his evolution that what his aesthetic conscience prompted, quality, lay in the *seed*, for nature proved it, an experience that later became one of the basic tenets of the Indian philosophy. Just as man learnt that health can be maintained only by respecting the laws of nature, he also learnt that where his handiwork failed to acquire the excellence which is being yearned for and eye sought, he knew there was a lack of co-ordination between his concept, the material he used and the method he employed. This fusion was the fundamental pre-condition for quality—the master-craftsmanship. This was also the beginning of the laws of discipline. His heart must have surged up in joy at his

successful handiwork, the satisfaction which comes from creating and giving tangible shape to a mental concept or image. We must remember that every object that a tribal made was for himself or herself, for their daily use and therefore an intimate part of themselves, things they lived with. The value of the object was not in terms of what it would fetch but rather how well it would serve the social purpose, above all provide the inner sense of satisfaction. In the early days of striving and straining, the result of each movement must have seemed magical, each achievement a miracle. This is how the great tradition must have been moulded and history made, for his each act contained all the past, bringing to birth again old memories transformed into fresh inspiration, and as he put together parts out of the infinite possibilities before him, he worked out the future. Thereby emerged master-craftsmanship with all the requisite qualities of excellence, a dynamic embryo emerging from the womb of timelessness. For creativity in our philosophy is an eternally moving current like a cycle. Culture has therefore always been defined as dynamic.

The theory so often flung around that in India art had its birth in religion is erroneous. On the contrary every type of creative art had its springs in the activities of everyday life of the large mass of people. It has become necessary to dispel this misconception and clarify that no doubt art provided a pleasing and satisfactory vehicle for devotional practices but never exclusively. All creative activity enjoyed high appreciation and prestige. It is not surprising that one of the epitomes in which this sentiment is embodied is 'when the hands of a craftsman are engaged in his craft, it is always a ceremonial!' This explains the mystery of the emergence of this wonder of what is now known as master-craftsmanship, in the obscurity of remote forests and predominantly rural regions—an environment which in normal definition would be termed 'backward'. Obviously, apart from the pleasure and satisfaction the maker experienced from his activity, the touchstone of the quality was also measured by the intensity of the responses evoked in the onlooker too, and the measure of the enrichment of his experience. Thus the social objective and the psychological experience were the two cardinal factors that determined quality in the simple, early communities. There

could be no other criterion or test. For these communities were essentially self-contained, whatever they produced was for themselves and not for sale. Money economy had not made its appearance yet. Prestige and honour were determined by the high quality of workmanship. The same care and accomplishment went into a drinking bamboo mug or a staff for support.

Through this period of India's history, a long line of people kept coming in continuous streams, settling down, getting mingled with the indigenous people, exchanging knowledge, experience, skills, adding to the general enrichment. Crafts not only continued to hold the stage but became almost the kingpin in this new edifice of a new culture.

As agriculture cultivation expanded and improved, social activity accelerated multiplying needs, therefore proliferating crafts, broadening the range of its varieties and character. For visual and material verification and understanding of this period we depend partly on what the excavations keep revealing to us, but more authentically on the products that are still turned out by our craftsmen in an amazingly long unbroken line.

When we turn to literary references, descriptions of ancient crafts, the written legacy bequeathed to us from the Rig Veda, about 3000 years old or may be older, we come upon what seems like a vast treasure, which is difficult to visualise, therefore correctly assess. Over the millennia there has been an ever wider accumulation of knowledge, ever deepening as the time has rolled by, throwing light on what seems every conceivable subject. Commentaries and treatises on spiritual matters can be equally weighed with similar tomes on practical details of everyday routine.

These writings negate conclusively the notion often propagated that ancient Indians pursued a life of negation, austerity, withdrawal. They no doubt indulged in ample idealism. But this had its birth and amplitude in the fullness of the daily life of the people, as proved by our Puranic narratives and even the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, Sankara's Vedanta, etc. We are told of the delight the *rishis* took in aesthetic objects, in music and dances and were not discarded as worldly. Our temples are embellished with very human

scenes and episodes in painting and sculpture. The creative spring welling up through the senses was recognised as the source of art. But as time rolled by, man sought deeper responses than the mere sensory as would provide mere elevating experience, where the smooth flow of life was countered by rebellious or reformist currents, a synthesis was ultimately worked out. Therefore no austerity could hold sway and prove a killjoy. Excavations prove that our ancestors were very much peoples of the world and the best of art but reflects the common scenes and events. The vast treasures that excavations keep throwing up bear conclusive testimony to a people very much part of our rugged world and far from unworldly.

The first direct reference to *silpa* occurs in the Samhitas and the Brahmanas. This was however a general nomenclature with a much wider connotation covering a variety of skills and occupations besides the conventional handicraft. In fact in its first appearance, in the Brahmanas, it stands for works of art. In the Kausitaki Brahmana the term is extended even further to cover dance, drama and music. *Silpa* has also been defined in some texts as synonymous with the Vedic concept of *karu*, a term which stands for a 'maker', covering a wide range of performers, an artisan, a singer, a poet. No difference or distinction was made between the various forms of expression and embraced a wide range of skilled activity from music to horsemanship, painting to cookery, weaving to magic show, all being regarded as equal. In course of time this acceptance of all creative force as an integrated power emerging from a single source, became deified as Viswakarma—the maker of the universe. The making of things was therefore a noble act, the object a manifestation of Viswakarma. The tradition thus grew of offering a light and flowers to Viswakarma or a deity with a prayer before starting on any operation by a craftsman, for it was an offering to the deity as a sign that he, the worker-maker, was going to enter into communion with the divine spirit.

The most conclusive verdict on the high status of the craftsman or worker comes from a reference in Kamasutra, where 'nayak' a man of culture is described as a man who is knowledgeable with *silpas*. There are evidences to testify that *silpas* were being increasingly learnt and practised by people

at all economic and social levels. Buddhist texts describe house-holders working on crafts, including ruling royal family members, who had to be proficient in crafts. There is a famous incident related of a king who rejected a prince who sought his daughter's hand because he was not qualified in crafts.

Silpa kala carries the same idea as the English term art. But in the later Vedic period its attributes elaborated with a rapidly changing scene. Over the centuries the craftsman had carried out his vocation as part of his service to his community with whom his involvement was deep and significant. It was sharing in an inherited tradition which embraced the entire life of the community. Now, as the communities grew in size, crafts and craftsmen multiplied, craftsmanship became a profession, followed first by individuals, later by set social groups. These changes were taking place in an entirely different social milieu, far removed from the old simple self-contained community. The tradition no doubt continued but now in a very changed complex framework. The crafts were now an important sector in a blossoming world of consumer goods. They had moved from the modest hamlets and houses into flourishing markets, transformed from the objects that were made to meet only the primary needs of the community into also articles of accomplishment, valued symbols of an expanding culture. The extreme sensitivity to and image of master-craftsmanship continued however to be cherished and respected, if anything more tenaciously, but in a fast moving economy and proliferation of consumer goods, in which crafts as we shall presently see, still had a key role to play.

Obviously all of this craft activity could not be counted as art experience nor all of the craftsmen be expected to be creative and perform as artists. Threat to the quality of excellence acquired through long disciplined work was sensed. For quality is the first casualty in proliferation of production. The need to formulate measures to preserve the gains obtained through ages of disciplined, dedicated work became compelling. Formal cannons needed to be determined by adequate training in skills and coordinated disciplined action. The many complex elements involved in the making of craft, had to be firmly safeguarded. Thus laws of balance, through proportion and symmetry, precision cultivated through the sensitivisation of the eye into sci-

entific draughtsmanship, of harmony through cadence and rhythm, experienced manipulating of pliable hands to formulate shapes into aesthetic forms, the gambolling with colours, with light and shade, all these had to be carefully delineated. These guidelines were necessarily complicated for the forms varied from character to character.

Copying and reproduction from nature was not permissible. Equally, nothing was to be left to the exigencies of chance or of accident. Several objects, particularly the images which were very individual, each in a different posture, bends of the body and limbs, facial expressions, moods, qualities, attributes, complex with elaborate symbols and embellishments attached, and meaningful decorations to add splendour and dignity to each. As these directions were elaborate and had to be strictly adhered to, they were embodied in poetic verses that every craftsman memorised and chanted for guidance, describing the proportions for each and its related attributes, the colours to be used, the weight of the raw materials, the character to be subtly depicted and what seem like a million other details. These principles were equally applicable to other ordinary objects as well. Hence formal qualities were laid down in carving, casting and other processes for objects physically measurable.

By about the 4th century A.D. these directives and guidelines had come to be compiled into elaborate technical treatises, enumerating infinite details, defining the merits and demerits. There are references in many ancient books on this subject but the best known are Silpa Sastra, Agni Purana, Vishnudharmotama.

The early Indo-Aryans were deeply impressed by an eternal order to which the universe seemed to them to be tuned. 'Firm seated are the foundations of Eternal Law in whose lovely form are many splendid beauties', is one of the very old axioms. To them their world was anarchic matter to be wrought into a universal order. For them, following the laws underlying forms of thought and behaviour would bring order out of a nebulous mass of raw material and by invigorating the potency in it, unfold the hidden unknown into the known. It was also realised that observance of natural laws resulted in economy of materials, effort, energy, and time. The implementation of these

laws was not however an earthy mechanical operation, but went beyond into a higher realm, thus lifting human existence above the level of the mere physical structure to a keener perception of beauty. Intrinsically, this was feasible where the artists worked in close communion with nature, not in confrontation, as inevitably happens when technology tries to dominate. Then tension pervades.

How were these laws formulated? Presumably by modelling on the ideal forms which had been moulded by generations of masters from their observation of the world around, through their disciplined senses and mind, and their inner experiences. These directions were meticulously worked out, almost with reverence. For they were sensitive and exacting, zealous of the preciousness of their proud achievements. Their two recognised sources of inspiration were : the Visible World around and the Inner One of imagination and intuitive vision. The object to be projected had to be the manifestation of the artist's experience of merging into the object.

The shift in the role of the crafts and the diverse demands on them also called for improved tools and more complicated technology. Tools were after all only extensions of the hands, to reach beyond the range of human limitations. Technology was the art of making. In fact, in Greek *techne* meant art. Like the Greeks the Indians did not separate the making from the mental image to be given shape. Technology was a means for achieving ones purpose. The approach to natural elements was one of collaborating in fusion, not a spirit of exploiting. Now we tend to equate technology more and more with novel performances, like satellites or flying to outer space. This ancient technology was contrived at the human level to meet normal human wants. *Extraordinary* was not considered by our ancients as an attribute of the highest and noblest achievement. The oriental psyche extolled the nobility of the normal. The Middle Path of Buddhism is perhaps this, for it said, 'Everyday norm is truth'.

Most elaborately detailed were the instructions on constructions especially edifices like temples, monuments, palaces, tombs, etc, beginning with the clearing of the ground, through different stages of the work. With the variety of

materials in use, breaking of the stones, laying the foundation and the progress of brick to brick, floor by floor, with stone, cement, all indicate that the structure had to be raised with meticulous care and highly disciplined effort; For descriptions as related by B. C. Law in the Legends of the Topes, prove that crafts were becoming specialised. In this process again the central focus is on quality and emphasis on the preservation of master-craftsmanship. As a lasting and conclusive evidence of this is the fine stone work done on the Sanchi Gate by the ivory workers of Vidisa. It is a startlingly moving example of upholding the high ideal of aiming at the best, hence the gentle delicate hands were put to work on hard stone so that the same sensitive surface may be wrought even on a hard resistant surface. Here is a magnificent cue for those who care to tread the difficult path of master-craftsmanship. It reveals the faith, confidence and devotion of the craftsmen to their vocation, that under their experienced hands even hard stone would soften and become pliable as ivory.

Apart from the written texts, considerable information is available on craftsmen and crafts from ancient inscriptions all over, particularly in the architectural field. These monuments having become important urban centres of trade and affluence naturally provided high patronage to art and in return demanded best quality in material and workmanship. This local concentration resulted also in special art styles and characteristics each evolving into its own, what may be called, 'School of Art'. It is these inscriptions that explicate for us the range of specialists in crafts engaged in constructional work and their varied functions, a clear evidence of the intense specialisation in craftsmanship. Here we also have hands of several craftsmen who worked on special items like a pillar, a doorway, an image, etc.

Several other factors emerge from these epigraphs: modification in the institution of craft teacher-pupil, that is, the craft training is no more confined exclusively to the family, the father-son or mother-daughter pattern. A change is inevitable in a society where almost a craft explosion is taking place. Where master-craftsmen won wide renown like Kunika, his pupils took equal pride in proclaiming themselves as this master's pupils for all time, inscribing this fact along with their

names on their handiwork, both on the famous Parkham Yaksha and the Yakshini of Mathura. At the same time the inscriptions also show the two systems worked side by side. For there are names of craftsmen showing through their geneology adherence to the hereditary custom over two to three generations. The inscriptions also tell us that the craftsmen had become mobile and turned into an itinerant community with a central location of activity where a collection of master-craftsmen gathered, and others from afar must have come to be the extra hands needed. This continuous pumping in of diverse styles, forms, resulted in an infinite variety. This also meant that while certain concentrated centres emphasised and elaborated on local styles they did not stay confined to one locale but spread out in many directions as the itinerants moved around.

Another fact revealed is that often the same set of craftsmen built different style temples, edifices, monuments for different sects, Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain. This confirms that Indian art rises from a single source and is basically an integrated product.

It is fascinating to trace in some of these inscriptions, details attached to each craftsman working on a project, the place where he hailed from, some quite distant. It is said that whenever a new edifice on a large scale was to be undertaken the news was widely proclaimed. There are texts which provide detailed instructions for the choosing of the master-craftsman to be in-charge of various jobs, how to scrutinise and test the capacity of the different set of craft workers. The master is referred to in the old texts as *avesanin*, undoubtedly an artist of superb quality. The same term appears also in several inscriptions, a designation conveying artist of authority. Curiously enough there was not only construction going on, but equally feverishly excavations, especially in the post-Buddhist period. It was the common practice to cut caves out of rocks to be used as places of worship, for monasteries, hence also as centres of art. Here again one saw the same meticulousness towards the execution of the job in hand. Competent craftsmen familiar with construction techniques were employed, for the undertaking was approached with deep sentiment and respect, the entire operation carefully supervised by those who were

themselves master-architects.

As trading posts grew in size and importance with expanding commerce both in land and overseas, it naturally continued to transform the structure of craft production. Regular workshops now came into operation with groups of craftsmen attached to them, referred to as *silpasas*. Basically however the ideal of master-craftsmanship continued to dominate the craft world even in the face of the ever growing challenges of changing times. There was no wavering or weakening, excellence had to be maintained.

Even though craftsmanship was hereditary and passed on from generation to generation with inheritance of skill, an automatic transference of excellence and good craftsmanship as such was not assumed. There was equal emphasis on proper education and the right environment for the growing youth. Under hereditary craftsmanship, the young craftsman was brought up and educated in the actual family workshop under the discipleship of his father, uncle or elder brother, whoever happened to be the head of that family. In the bosom of the family workshop the techniques were taught in their entirety in direct relation to basic production, primarily by practice. Moreover, youth learnt more than technique, he learnt also the true value of things, metaphysics, aesthetics and in short, culture. In the Indian tradition it is said that a craftsman is considered accomplished only when his repertoire of creations covers ten different materials which include earth, wood, stone, plaster, metal, ivory, etc. In fact, even the title 'silpi' was not applied to a craftsman until he became an expert in his line.

With the acceleration in the craft activity, the rapid growth in the craftsmen, the dimensions of the craft turnover grew voluminous and there had to be efforts simultaneously to maintain the excellence in the newer emerging sectors. So, it was necessary to provide training and performance outside the limited family circle. The old custom of the young progeny automatically taking on the ancestral crafts was modified to let the young craftsman make his own choice.

Young aspirants were now attached to veteran master-craftsmen. In course of time, this also became a unique institution. Even though initiation and instruction in

craftsmanship was the core of training, there was no isolation of this from the much larger life. Though this process of training was professionalised, it basically rested on the old Indian model of *guru-shishya*. The apprentice therefore lived in the masters house and was expected to do some of the masters chores for him. In return, he received his food and clothing. The master was strictly debarred from engaging the pupil in any other work on pain of penalty. The Kusa and other Jataka Smritis give detailed information on this institution. Narada has a long treatise on this. The *Acharya*, Master, was enjoined to treat the pupil as his own progeny : the pupil was expected to put in full terms, not leave. For in this setting the pupil learnt many other little tasks which were part of the daily routine, picking up skills even as he did other phases and facets of the larger life. The problems were real, not make-believe, as often happens in education, for it was understood that training aimed at the unfolding of the personality to make for fuller life, for the quality of inspiration which is transmuted into the flowering of the objective can hardly be taught. It has to be cultivated by experience. This made for a very special relationship between the teacher and the taught, an intimacy binding the two. The latter looked up to the former as the source from which not only knowledge in the sense of skill and competence is imbibed, but great truths interpreted.

The instructor was expected to educate the trainees as much through his own personal conduct as through his instruction, and was also to show the same respect and regard for the pupil as he would for a member of his family. The sharing of problems, finding solutions and other varied experiences added to the enrichment and formation of a student's personality. The teacher was not to keep any worthwhile knowledge as a trade secret from his pupil. On the contrary the teacher was supposed to spur the pupils on to surpass him and take genuine pride in conceding superiority to the students.

In a craft orientated society, a master-craftsman was also a social leader and an important entity in the community, for craftsmanship was also a tribute to the high function of the human being who is endowed with attractive talents and is not just a physical frame.

The preparation of the overall design and the ultimate

execution of a project was in the hands of the Elders, *Theras* as they are called, 'gifted with six high faculties and most wise', who directed the entire project. The minutest detailed instructions in the texts, through stanzas in verse which each craftsman had to memorise, all were directed towards this goal. In addition, whole scenes of craft operation were carefully etched on the walls of the buildings constructed, so vivid, so alive, as though moving on a screen. The master-craftsman is shown actually creating some object while the apprentices watch intently. Entire processes in progress, from the gathering of the raw material, even quarrying are shown. There is also a full display of the complete set of tools needed for each planned object and its operation, and finally the finished article. However, over emphasis on techniques that accelerate speed and swell the quantum of volume but are divorced from imagination and the necessary inner alchemy was strictly avoided as this would result in negativating the upliftment and exaltation necessary for creative action.

The ever burgeoning immensity of art activity compelled the build-up of experts and specialists, not only to maintain standards but also encourage and guide experiments. For it is clear from texts as well as epigraphs that every activity ensured the fullest participation of the craftsmen resident or itinerant at all levels and their share was always significant. Different nuances and styles resulted in wider diversification with innovations and adoption of new techniques to meet new demands. One sees greater elaboration in the craft establishments such as codification, theoretical enunciations, classification of types, etc. But it was understood that *these keep step with the flow and march of production*.

Not only are the *silpas* enumerated in the inscriptions, but also the varying categories of artists relevant to them, the role of each and even the work charge, which clearly brings out the role of the participants. This coordinated and cumulative effect of every man creating and contributing naturally resulted in a glowing wealth of art. It is evident that standardisation and consolidation mingled with fresh activity and innovation. A sort of a hierarchy gets composed, with each specialist assigned a specific function as a safety measure against deterioration as activities multiply.

An important figure in the upper art echelons of the master-

craftsmen engaged in directing important structures is the *sutradhar*. He originally belongs to dramatics where his role in the Sanskrit drama was to introduce the play to the audience in the form of a prelude. He is also the holder of the strings in puppetry, where he literally manipulates the play. In the art activity, *sutradhar* starts out as an expert engraver, a scribe mainly of royal characters, also of private donors with gifts for construction of temples and monuments. This engraving on copper plate or stone slab, judging by both texts and epigraphs relating to crafts, seems to have assumed substantial proportions, especially as urbanisation intensified and constructural work boomed. The *sutradhar* is a natural product of the massive building industry. The *sutradhar* moved up to higher levels as his skills expanded and he gained mastery over all structural operations. The *sutradhars* too became well versed in the theories of act and have left texts and treatises to prove their expertise in craftsmanship and architecture. According to the texts the *sutradhar* had also to be 'well versed in Vedas and Sastras'. 'One who is of good behaviour, forgiving nature—free from avarice, clever, learned, skilful'. Such were the high standards expected of the masters. A custom that added prestige and status to craftsmanship was the renown a family won for the masterpieces it had been producing for several generations and carried the stamp of that household. Every member of that family had to put out the best or the family would be in disgrace. The epigraphs particularly give the names of a number of these master-craftsmen, their lineage, names of related members, how two branches of a single family distinguished themselves in two different parts of the region, under different regimes, different patrons, and how both branches distinguished themselves, each elated by the fame of the other. The rise and success of individual careers is also described to stir the imagination and ambition of the rising youth. It is amazing how many names of craftsmen are engraved in the epigraphs with descriptions of their distinguished qualities, eulogistic details of their achievements, the status they attained, the patronage they enjoyed. It leaves us in no doubt as to how they must have fired the emotions of youthful artists.

Another source of inspiration and stimulation to high craftsmanship was by describing through inscriptions on

structures as permanent records noted *silpis* and their fine works emphasised through alluring comparisons like, this *silpi* is as a tiger among sculptors, or a thunderbolt in the mountains, an architect of three worlds, is a jewelled crest, or a repository of all *silpa vidya*. or he is one who has seen the farthest shore of the ocean of various crafts. Incentive was the high status the masters could attain and be among the elite or claim a high pedigree by being a limb of a noted family of masters, as also an elitist status for their own skill and proficiency and the people's recognition of it. Some even came to be designated *acharyas-pundits* in craftsmanship.

A new element was injected into the concept of art around the 9th century taking firm shape and flowering finally into a definite philosophy, further fortifying master-craftsmanship. Creativity is endowed with two characteristics : purpose and order. First is *use*, from which value is derived, the other right action, from which is derived pleasure. But in a genuine creative performance, the essential elements are neither utility by itself nor a mere pleasing appearance, nor knowledge. Art, the end product of a creative function, was now endowed with a deeper meaning beyond the physical aspects involved in the creation. This element was *rasa*: essence of both emotion and facts, hard to describe for it was a sort of a subjective experience, and the most significant factor that would determine the ultimate objective in artistic endeavour. The fine sensitivity endemic in every one had to be activated so that the exhilaration experienced by the artist also exhilarated the beholder. This was in fact a major test of the high calibre of the *silpa* or art piece created. *Rasa* was an element of non-physical nature, an essential inner core, imparting vitality, unity, rhythm to a physical form, be it craft, music or dance. The term was borrowed from medicine to mean juice, Interestingly enough, the Greek 'catharsis' is also a medical term. Properties capable of evoking subjective feeling and which subserved the artistic end, that is ability to evoke and achieve artistic consummation, was called *guna*, quality, perfection. Whatever creation failed to achieve this was *dosha*, a blemish, imperfect.

There were other factors involved in the concept of *rasa*. No copying, that is, reproduction from nature or any object was permissible, as this was considered a mechanical, static

process, and creation had to be dynamic. In the making of an object, the concept was basic. The art object the artist produced had to be the essence of the impressions he absorbed deep into his consciousness, not a photographic copy. It had to be an inner experience described as 'being' which is not something presented through a contrivance of knowledge. It had to be the essence, the *rasa*. The emphasis on the dynamic as against the static was applicable even to architecture.

If in a completed form blemishes were discernible or mistakes mar its perfection, the errors arose from lack of clarity in the concept, not in the end result. Mistakes could occur from cloudy or inadequate imagination or from lack of the close coordination between the maker, the material and the method. An aesthetic composition could be achieved only when all particles of the components became fused together into a harmonious whole, not a conglomeration of parts put together. It was the alchemy from intimate relationship that lit the creative spark. This called for singleness of the mind and the heart, and therefore purposeful character in the artist, competence acquired not by mere acquisition of knowledge but an inner culturing, through sharpening of sensitivity, like cultivating land to make it yield more resplendent blossoms and tastier fruit : for intuition which comes from a self identification of the *silpi* with the theme. The intuitive mode was considered primarily inspirational, imaginative, creative and guided by an aesthetic conscience. Moreover, the greatness of an art price was valued by the aesthetic experience not only of the maker but the onlooker as well. But this was not supposed to result from or related to only the material form or colour, which meant just the semblance of appearance, the external qualities. It had to reveal an essential meaningfulness that provides a new experience the test of creativity. For each time the artist makes something it is a fresh creation. A reproduction fell short of it, the reaction in the beholder became superficial, it could never stir the inner self and make it an elevating experience. When the artist conjures up a new experience it enriches both the artist as well as the viewer or the user of the object. It is like a dish of food, each time it is served, the savouring is new, even though the ingredients and cooking process may be the same. The art model cannot be a dead one

for it carried within it the seed of life, creation, the continuing concept which motivates the action. A work of art had to have a dual purpose : outwardly for utility, inwardly for delight. The function of form is to manifest the meaning of the content.

It was not however assumed that the onus of making the viewer or the user savour the flavour lay on the artist alone. Stress was laid equally on the members of the community, on their need to make every effort to sharpen their own sensitivities to come into tune with the artist, enrich their sensibilities, widen their horizon, deepen their emotional response, penetrate new areas, savour fresh experiences and gather new knowledge.

Beauty did not mean merely the appearance that strikes the senses; it was not what you saw but what the image meant, nor was it to be a supplement to utility. When objectivity was expected of the artist in his creative performance, it was exactly what the modern theoretician calls scientific detachment.

There was also an insistence on eliminating the duality of the sense of subjective and objective, evolving instead a sense of oneness in the personality of the artist. Thus grew the tradition of the conceiver and performer being a single entity, and creation a self-involved experience emanating from a world of varied materials from clay to gold, straw to silk. It was equally essential to get tuned to one's environment so that it was also part of what one was doing. It was believed that freedom from attachment contributed to making action more efficient, so more effective, hence implicit in the mental state. Detachment was parallel with mental peace, for it was not possible to have one without the other. Equally compelling was harmony with the work and the surroundings. It is not surprising therefore that in the craft world yoga, the epitome of discipline, is described as skill in action. In other words it conveyed that as yoga improved the quality of life, so did skill, that the ultimate aim of art was more than savouring an aesthetic experience. It was an enrichment of the total being, ultimately leading to the artist transcending himself for his final liberation. The significance of *rasa* was transformed into a philosophy to become the highest echelon of the entire hierarchy of knowledge.

It was realised however that craftsmanship was a social activity which fulfilled a normal purposeful social function to

resolve the material and social ends of man. Man is a social being: and therefore part of a social milieu. Therefore the creative urges have to manifest themselves in visible and tangible forms through an integrated and disciplined organism.

Craft Guilds

The vast growth of the craftsmen's communities can be assumed by the fact that they were encouraged to live together in special parts of a city or in special villages. Buddhist Jatakas tell of such exclusive congregations. Jaina Uvasagadasao mentions a potters' village of 500. Some of these seem to have been like suburbs of cities. The population of such colonies was never less than 500, average ranging between this and a thousand. With such large numbers engaged in crafts, a special organisation of theirs was inevitable. Thus the Crafts Guilds came to be set up. Starting during the Vedic period they came down through the centuries. The function of the Guild was legislative, judicial and executive. Rules on distribution of profits, liabilities, investments, dividends were enforced. Members of the Guild had to divide their earnings equally. The Guild also acted as a public bank receiving deposits and paying interest, even Kings are supposed to have invested funds with them. All transactions were carried on in a most systematic manner under proper laws and deeds.

The Guild enjoyed complete autonomy but worked in close relation with the civil establishment. The head of a Guild was called *Parmukha* (Chief) or *Jettaka* (Alderman). He wielded considerable influence, even acted as adviser to the King. According to the Uruga Jataka, one *Parmukha* even acted as a Minister to a King of Kosala. Only where members broke the Guild's laws, the state could intervene. The Guilds played a leading role in the socio-economic life of the people until the late medieval times, then began to decline. The high position occupied by the Crafts Guilds, the enormous influence they exercised in the State their special position vis-a-vis the ruler, all show the very crucial position crafts occupied in the life of the country.

Chapter II

CRAFTS GALORE

THE OLDEST REMAINS of Indian crafts that one can see and touch, belong to what has come to be known as the Indus Valley period, for the first excavations were attempted in the region of this Valley. Of course today the area covering these remnants has widened and comes as far south as Gujarat. The exposition of not merely artifacts, but the existence of whole remarkably planned cities possessing all the requisites of civilisation, well laid out roads, massive constructions, scientific drainage and irrigation, puts India's antiquity on a par with Sumer, Babylon, Assyria, Egypt.

Crafts have an astoundingly wide range. Here we see marked craftsmanship that speaks of high order of achievement. Beads show enormous skill with delicate carving on each, some with a number of colours on a single bead and lively innovations in glossing. A very large variety of pottery turned out on the wheel, with fine delicate lines that move one by their sheer grace, emphasis being more on the form than embellishment. Basically deep down in man are the same sensations that had to be communicated through the world of objects, whether they be 5000 years ago or today. After all, creative expressions are but the ideas and themes that are transmuted into everyday life by the artist through objects that are subjective in concept, not pale copies of nature but impressions absorbed, therefore symbolic, with significant content. Here one perceives unmistakably the high-lighting and appreciation of quality through master-craftsmanship. The wondrous part of this is the realisation that these objects are not mere shadows of a gone by millennia, but equally current. You may watch an Indian craftsman turn his pottery wheel and turn out just these shapes right before 'your eyes' or etch the same birds or animals on a wood panel and the same figure on a slab of stone. We are constantly reminded of this amazing fact that a single unbroken thread seems to have come down through the craftsmen's hands over several thousand years.

Substantially so many of the old forms seem to persist and continue to exercise the same influence, one may well ask why? Obviously because they fulfil the recurring needs of one kind or another in the lives of our people, from the archaic clay objects to the refined and highly sophisticated bronze Dancing Shiva. They still provide the same inspiration and sense of elevation and continue to be current and meaningful, even in this fast changing world.

Earthen Ware

Clay is the most ancient and natural medium for making objects of utility and meeting social, cultural and religious needs of the community. One of the characteristics of the Indian art work in clay is its immense variety, much more so in earthen ware as this material is universally available. Harappan and post-Harappan is typical of the very early period between 900 and 300 B.C. Intrinsically utilitarian, it was suitably decorated in various colours, sometimes three shades on one, and geometrical designs, also animals and birds, humans, some in the stylised fashion which continues to this day as the 'folk style' often with a flavour of the modern 'abstract'. This is one of the exciting facts about the continuity of Indian craft tradition. It cannot really be dated. It seems to be for all time, for it has in it the germ of truth which man is eternally seeking. It thus symbolises man's first craftsmanship. Incidentally, the potter's wheel also seems to be the best machine man invented to use the power of motion for a productive purpose. The use of fire revolutionised earthen ware, for, from this later emerged the terracotta art.

The Harappans in the latter half of the 3rd millennium B.C. devised the mould first used only for the face. Later in the Sunga times, larger sized moulds as also double ones were evolved. Actually, the ancient texts take the moulded bricks back to the Vedic times. Pots made on the wheel had a lovely finish and graceful design from nature or geometrically incised with blunt points or imprinted in relief by moulds or stamps. The spouts as well as the handles often had animal or bird shapes. Decorations on the surface were through two or three cordons with demarcating rubs or ridges, indentations on the

rims, band designs made from beads, fish scales, ultimately leading to richly coloured designs on brick tiles, etc. Worthy of mention are the Malwa ware because of its fineness through the elaborate treatment of the surfaces by means of thick slip of reddish to pink, and painting in black, and the Jorwe in Maharashtra because of its metallic ring. The famous Painted Grey Ware made of well levigated clay and turned on a rapid wheel, with a lustrous metallic finish, are important because of the large tracts of the country they covered from Bengal down to Madhya Pradesh, and must have played a significant part in ceramic development in the closing period of the millennium.

In pottery, the black polished ware had fine red coating with soft animal and geometric patterns. Very beautiful was the incised ware with slight decoration. With exquisite delicacy is wrought the eggshell pottery popularly known as Kagzi, with perforated all-over patterns. Probably the most exciting is the miniature pottery, imaginatively executed. The toy world is effulgent with playthings painted in bright colours and wrought with ingenuity. The now famous seals, known for the very special bull and bison, also carry legends on them. Exquisite jewellery, delicate inlay work and many others hard to enumerate, show enormous skill, including the noted enchanting figurines.

By now the technique of inward firing was in vogue mainly in Central and Western India, Deccan, Gujarat, which produced ware with black inside and red outside, a slightly different version. The period from 200 B.C. to 600 A.D. covering the Sunga, Kushana and Gupta periods, saw a rich flowering of clay wares of all sorts, in radiant colours, limitless designs, painted, incised, stamped or mould made. What is rather extraordinary about this pottery is that it travelled all over the land as revealed by the excavations.

Its importance in the national life is amply testified by the several references to these wares in the Vedic literature, Atharvaveda, White Yajurveda and other texts. It is then finally epitomised in Silpa Sastra, the bible of the crafts in India, at no stage despised as cheap, always treated with dignity. Instructions in detail are explicated, beginning with how to

select clay, describing its qualities, how to strengthen it by mixing other ingredients like husk, cotton, grit, etc., the turning and the firing.

The wealth of figurines in the Indus Valley finds shows the use of moulds, single for the relief ones, and double for the round ones. Here polychrone colours are used with practised hands.

The term archaic to describe these figurines would be misleading as they cannot be dated, for while more sophisticated forms have come and gone, these simple hand-modelled, pinched to the required size, still hold world attention because of their unique charm and distinctive style. They obviously belong to the world community of fertility symbols. Some have extraordinary characteristics like applique-incised eyes formed by fixing oval clay pellets and incising them from nose to ear, and an applique mouth. Counterparts of these—not copies—are in minutest sizes. They are quite original, unrelated to any prevailing sculpture, band-modelled, or in a single piece. They carry the most fantastic style of head dresses, turbans, hair ornaments or bunches of rosettes on the head.

The most graceful figurines belong to the Sunga period in which they were covered in transparent clay drapery which nevertheless showed complete details of the body, wearing lots of ornaments. The striking ones in the Kushana era are the *salabhanjikas*, executed with an unbelievable care and tenderness. They continue to live today in the millions of votive offerings made in the rural areas to the local deities. Apart from the paramount demands made by domestic needs, on the clay craft, the religious ones offered even a wider dimension and status. There would be galaxies of deities in the local pantheons, rich in variety and cosmopolitan in character, to be worshipped on various occasions.

From early times man seems to have sensed a presence behind every natural phenomenon and the craftsman has tried to give shape to his concept of each of these spirits through a primeval cult. These spirits are propitiated by votive offerings of a very large variety of clay animals and figurines, in a wide range of proportions from life size to miniatures. They are usually well decorated mainly by women because of the delicacy

of their fingers. They are very expressive, vital and lively.

Terracotta Temples

Terracotta sculpture in architectural edifices became monumental especially in temples. Some of the best examples can still be seen in West Bengal. From external decorations with figures, the innovation went to direct structures through moulded bricks, tiles, panels, aesthetically designed. Superb classical figures were made in terracotta. A woman's head has become a choice piece in a Calcutta museum, in which the suggestion of a smile seems to play on the half part of the lips, endowing the head with a subtle charm which defies description.

Amongst the most striking creations of these periods are the clay plaques on which the artists revelled in presenting a wide world of themes, birth and death scenes, royal courts, wars, hunting scenes, animal kingdom, including domesticated animals. Most alluring are the diverse pastimes of the women, largely a preoccupation with birds; one even shows a parrot pecking at a lady's lips sitting on her hand, taking them for pomegranate seeds : more intriguing, a swan catching water drops pressed by a lady out of her hair, supposing it to be rain! Equally favourite are scenes of women adorning themselves in multifarious ways. Sporting with birds was one of the *kalaskala* meant an activity producing refined and sensitive effects. Adornment was an accomplishment, *kala*, cultivated with tests, which literally meant art. Art and beauty are often synonymous with divinity. That Beauty was an element that elevated man, leading up to bliss, is persistently stressed through every conceivable medium.

In the Gupta and post-Gupta era, though stone entered as a major material, clay figures continued in large dimensions with more complicated casting and moulding techniques like the use of double moulds. What is most satisfying is the continued approach to every creative effort with sensitivity and seriousness, even where the material, as here, is mere clay. For instance take the clay medallion depicting scenes from the epic story of Shakuntala. This superb effort at perfect workmanship can match any masterpiece in marble or precious

metal. That is where the greatness of this craft heritage lies.

Terracotta is another phase of the clay craft and a very ancient one too, going back at least to early third millennium B.C. It assumed importance in the Harappan period judging from the abundance of animal and human forms. It continues through the Sunga, Kushana, Maurya, Gupta and post-Gupta period proving that terracottas were the direct creative expression. The Mauryan period saw the formation of an improved human as a round figure and the Gupta period witnessed the perfection of a new manufacturing technique by which the wheel, the mould and the hand could operate together. The most alluring items are the toys and dolls. Literary texts also provide guidance on their manufacture, especially as they seemed an important item at festivities and auspicious occasions, especially marriage, particularly in the form of toys and dolls as they figured in rituals as well as the dowry the bride carried along with rich garments and jewellery. In the golden age of Sanskrit literature, the famous play by Sudraka, *Mricchakatika*, popularly known as 'Toycart', was about a clay cart.

Terracotta attained its height when it was adopted as the chief material in constructions like temples and palaces, through the use of plaques, carved bricks and tiles as part of important architecture. Temples were raised with tiers of niches of various sizes and shapes to hold panels which had decorative motifs or scrolls relating legends or epic stories. Thus terracotta could take multifarious forms from temples to statuary. As elsewhere, the craftsmen seemed to draw freely on almost everything to fill the scenes on the plaques. What is astounding is the excellence of the craftsmanship displayed. Stories are picturised in splendidly sculptured terracotta with high quality of technical perfection. The narratives show much more the art of the people as it moved their heart and imagination with a stamp of genuine authenticity. The earlier ones are in fact more lively, rendered with a warmer devotion, therefore finer skill.

Terracotta blossomed in its artistic vitality in Bengal in the 7th or 8th centuries judging by the rich forms of Mainamati and Paharpur in the Pala era. As communities expanded with acceleration of trade and commerce, the profusion of earthen

ware increased. In fact, it still holds sway in the Indian scene and as one goes through the country, one can see tiny mountains of them everywhere as they must have lain centuries ago, timeless, ageless, meeting some unquenchable need that no other substitute could satisfy, brittle and transient, above all, the material comparatively still cheap. In fact it is a product that has made a big come back all the world over, vying for pride of place alongwith sophisticated works of art in drawing rooms, art galleries, museums. A significant fact to be remembered in the Indian context is that the basic foundation of art-craft and its infrastructure built in clay, then passed on to wood, stone and metal, with only changes in the tools and processes of manufacture.

Glazing seems to have been in use from early times judging from the brilliant slips on Harappan pottery, an intricate glaze from mixed composition. Glazes appear also in the Kushan time, 2nd century A.D. But the emphasis was much more on painting, staining before or after firing, and on lacquering. Glaze, however, came back in a big way and took root with the arrival of the Muslim influence specially art loving rulers like the Moghuls. This art itself was undoubtedly known to the Indians even before as borne out by the markedly Hindu symbols and local characteristics. This, however, became highly refined, named Chini or Kashi, under the stimulating patronage of the Mughals. In fact, there are experts who consider these tiles as amongst the most remarkable. The original earthen ware was substituted by an artificial body of siliceous sand. In the Kashi work the architectural decoration is made of pieces carved out from the encaustic tiles, to form mosaics. This method is more like cutting colours to required shapes which are then fixed in lime mortar. These depict human and animal figures, picturising life of different people particularly royal personages of the court.

India has numerous types of decorative pottery, there is the blue pottery of Delhi and of Jaipur, made from quartz, with the typical turquoise. Some is semi-transparent, mostly decorated with arabesque patterns. In some the decoration is by etching. The important thing to remember is that the shape is always dictated by the function. Kutch and Saurashtra in Gujarat have all the richness of the local textiles, lacquer ware,

bead-work, whose ornamental sense seems wonderfully reflected even through clay. There are also novel items like the magic water pot or *karagiri* which is filled up from an aperture from the bottom, and when the pot is put back on its base the water stays inside and does not run out.

Here again the emphasis is on the beauty of the form, which always has precedence over colour and ornamentation.

Wood Work

As man came to acquire greater control over his environment, he wandered into newer sectors, trying, testing, perfecting other raw materials to meet his growing needs, adding more variety, savouring fresh experiences. Wood was the most natural and sumptuously provided of readily available materials. There is something alluring about the grain of the wood, with multi-tinted shades flowing into each other, and a texture with a glow on it.

In India, the tree came to acquire a special significance as an organism pulsating with an inner life, ever living and perpetually renewing itself with the swelling productive juices and transforming itself seasonally, expressed in symbolic motifs as *kalpataru* or *kalpadruma*, so profusely depicted in sculpture and painting, typifying the blossoming and creative fertility in man. Worship of trees is symbolic of this mysterious force. It is not surprising that spiritual experiences should be associated with trees. Buddha attained enlightenment under the Bodhi tree; the Jaina Tirthankaras (teachers) also have their respective Kevala tree under which they gained supreme knowledge. Trees or luxuriant creepers are shown in some ancient frescoes overflowing with coins, ornaments, etc., as a sign of the gifts and blessings trees and plants bestow on mankind.

India has a luxurious range in wood, for each variety has its own particular properties of grain and strength. Man discovered this wondrous quality of the wood and soon felt the magic pulsating in his own fingers which could cut and shape this material. Soon a wonderland of beauty was shaped out of it, for every little thing for use could be beautified by some carving, so could the surroundings, in fact every part of the structure could be decorated.

The discerning wood workers evolved styles and items that each particular type of wood would lend itself to, providing considerable range in attractive wood-work. For instance Kashmir has the soft toned elegant walnut and the facile deodar wood that have guided the craftsman's deft fingers into delicate lines and decorative motifs tastefully, and alluring objects with natural colours executed. The chiselling was always attuned to the function of the article. Similarly, fine lattice work that went into raising screens were delicately shaped into jewellery caskets.

For literary references, one can trace texts on wood work to Rigveda, White Yajurveda, Atharvaveda and Vatsyayan's Kamasutra where wood carving is described as one of the 64 *Kalas* (arts). Craftsmen who made different items were designated by a separate nomenclature. The carpenter made the usual household items'. Each item had a special function : a jug for holding milk, a cup with four corners was for sacrificial purpose, three types of bedsteads, each for a separate purpose, a stool of a certain height on which a woman sat to churn butter, large boxes for grain storage shaped in geometrical forms. The designs were made to be in tune with the form of the article on which they were made to emphasise its shape.

There are a few other items that carry high quality carvings: the palanquin and chariot (temple car). Some of the chariots are as elaborate as the pyramidal temple gate, with equally fine carving. Building of boats and ships had attained high quality as a craft. The earliest pictorial evidence of this is in the Ajanta frescoes dating around 500 B.C. This shows a highly decorative boat with the rim covered with designs and the prow carved with the form of an animal. An ancient sculpture in Orissa shows a pleasure boat with elaborate all over carving, small pavilions with people inside. Perhaps the most spectacular is a boat sculptured in an Amaravati panel. The book *Yuktikalpataru* has almost a complete treatise on boat building and includes instructions on its decoration, shapes for carving, furnishing, even the colours to be used. Similarly the warships were also lavishly decorated.

Local peculiarities are apparent in wood work, some unusual, like for instance a bookrest with, a tortoise base, over it a peacock, over it a lion, on the very top an elephant. Assam

has a goose throne, Hongasan, along with the peacock and elephant. Besides the household articles, craft appliances were also beautifully carved with foliage or each given bird or animal shape, be it a hammer, a shuttle, a pulley, a spinning wheel, these simple objects transformed into little works of art.

In this context, mention may be made of the carving of blocks for hand-printing. Few people realise that centuries of a faithfully observed tradition supplies the evergrowing demand for these exquisitely, painstakingly chiselled carvings on little pieces of wood. Mention is made here of just a few household items out of what seem like hundreds, to show how very *individual* each craft still was inspite of large numbers being prepared. This also reveals the rich imagination that enjoyed creating, the pleasure derived from a kind of playing with one's talent and skill to give birth to a new object, but with a purpose, and draw more diverse pleasure from increased varieties.

Woodwork flowered into maturity when it began to be used for carving images and structures. In India images form their own cosmology. They have ingredients of science, aesthetics, sociology and in the case of figures, religion. A significant fact about image makings is that the inner concept, the psychological factors involved, the laws leading to the unfolding of the concept and building of the figure, rules governing the shape, proportions, attributes, symbols, are tired irrespective of the material used to make the image.

There is no evidence of the anthropomorphic representation in Vedic times. First signs appear from the Maurya period, evolving through the Sunga and Kushan until it blossoms into its full glory in the Gupta period. We have now the images in wood, stone and metal, all conforming to the same principle. Indian craft in image making usually conjured up imagery from nature to draw comparisons, for one finds them galore in old Indian literature, likening men and women to nature and environmental objects. The muscle strength and tenacity is likened to a bull ; the slim waist to that of the lion ; long powerful arms to the deodar tree ; a woman's gait to that of the swan ; slow dignified walk to movements of the elephant, and so it goes on. The craftsmen were not to copy nature. Nevertheless they had to depict an infinite variety of characters and they

found answering symbols in the flora and fauna and in natural phenomenon. The subjective experience of the absorption of this flowed out into the imagery. Sometimes a synthesis was made where more than one strong element was involved. It was also a method of fusing the physical with the cosmic, to harmonise a blending of the human with nature, of the image with the surroundings.

The dominant qualities in each character the image represented were manifested through adjunctive signs and symbols to formalise various attributes that have now become part of a recognised heritage. Thus were abstract concepts presented in concrete forms but nevertheless they integrated with the surroundings, the environment. For example, a high quality figure of Buddha in meditation shows not only the descriptive pose but reflects equally wisdom, peace, bliss. That is what is expected of an image, an integrated personality.

There were clear guidelines on how this was to be achieved. Before starting on his work, the craftsman was expected to detach his emotions and go through the process of self-purification. Then with concentrated devotion, mentally visualise and identify his consciousness with the form he is to evoke. Meditate on the deity he is to make, says Shukracharya. The craftsman is asked when he is shaping the image to be single-minded like a hunter with his arrow taking aim, says the Bhagavad Purana. This inner concept is then to be translated into the image to be prepared. But it is not to be the result of direct perception, for that would be just a copy. Beauty, the craftsman is reminded, is a reality that has to be experienced by him through the object he creates.

But it has to have an objective, otherwise there is no sense of fulfilment. For without a point of departure and destination, there cannot be a flight.

An image was also expected to express an emotion animating it through the rhythm that would seem to quiver and run through the image, bringing it alive. Even where the image had to look grotesque or weird like Narasimha, half-man half-lion, the unusualness is expressed in a familiar symbol, the lion, to give full play to the fierce anger, and man to give the human touch. Here the figure projects the animation

through passion as also action through destruction. Durga is a much more complicated image. It shows a strange anomaly : tenderness, peace combined with destructive passion, what in Indian phraseology is described as the *satvic* (finer) element in a *tamasic* (demonical) image. Durga is a dreaded avenging power, yet she has to be shown as neither angry nor cruel, rather, compassionate, touched with sadness, the sadness that gently peeps out in the wise when they have to act an inevitable harsh part, but remain at heart a spectator as watching a drama. It is a stirring experience to grasp such an image in its entirety, for the conflicting emotions here are not at variance with each other nor any single part of the whole in contradiction to the complete whole. All the emotions seem to blend and find a natural unity. One is moved by an irresistible urge to contemplate before such a figure, for it is an elevating experience. This is what master-craftsmanship aimed at and achieved to enable the ultimate liberation of the human being. The maker as well as the viewer experience the moment of the soul, as it is philosophically defined.

The test of the quality and the perfection of the image was assessed by how instantaneous was the response to it. This disposition has been termed 'state of grace' which cannot be attained by effort, though external hindrances can be mitigated.

The unbounded variety of images is designed to cater to the moods, sentiments, preferences of the teeming millions. It is not surprising that the Hindus created 33 crores of gods. Each image is individualistic, each with specific proportions, facial expression, physical pose, gestures, decoration, all symbolic to denote attributes. It however pre-supposes an enormous fund of ability, determination, above all faith and devotion in the craftsmen to carve, cast, manipulate such an infinite variety of forms and the multi-farious symbols.

An image or any object of worship was however regarded as transitory, only to forge a link between the worshipper and the worshipped whether the image be of wood, stone or bronze. There was also a belief that the lineaments of an image could be determined by the relationship which subsists between the image-maker and the deity he is working on, if he is deeply absorbed in it through his devotion. An old Saivite invocation

says: 'On Thou who dost take the forms imagined by the worshippers'. An image was however not a compulsive necessity, for it had no absolute validity, only a logical one, as the ultimate aim was the melting away of the sense of duality and the fusion of the seemingly two separate entities. There was scope for this despite formal measurements for each character and symbols, for there was complete freedom for the image-maker for interpretation. That is one explanation for the image being alive with expressions of subtle emotions, suggestive smiles playing on the lips, laughter twinkling in the eyes: as also the myriad variations in the same form like for instance Ganesha. No two are absolutely alike. As there was no portrait sculpture in practice, expression of elemental experiences had to be individual. This was necessary if the image was to be dynamic not static. One may say that the parametres were more *formalised ideals* than *standardised cannons*.

Symbolism has played a crucial role in Indian crafts for it became a universal communicable medium through its vivid imagery. A symbol can contain several shades and levels of ideas. Every image was a symbol and at times spoke volumes through its postures, facial expression, garments, adornment, accessories, weapons carried. The world of symbolism is too vast for description here. One may briefly describe a few important ones, for it belongs to all time, not to be dated. So the ancients devised this method to preserve the truths, valuable lessons, thoughts worthy of being immortalised. Let us begin with the geometrical figures. The Absolute, with no beginning or end, homogeneity, uniformity is represented by a circle : a circle with a centre is consciousness, a circle bisected by a diameter is duality in manifestation: *swastika*, cosmic activity; serpent the complete life circle, the beginning without an end; cube islands for six aspects; *darsanas*, intuitive wisdom. Subramanya, a deity has six faces. There are multifaced figures, from Brahma to Ravana. The former is the spokesman for the four Vedas, the latter is said to represent his varied knowledge and skills. There are birds like the *Raj Hansa* (Swan), standing for wisdom, as a vehicle of Saraswati ; supernatural ones like *Guroor*, Vishnu's bird: half vulture, half man with a long bill, two wings and wearing a many coloured crown; earth rests on a tortoise for it saved the earth from deluge, a heart-warming

picture of this slowmoving creature carrying this massive mass of earth on its back. Fantastic forms like that of a horse composed of five young women or several animals with one head which is so placed as to belong to each of the several bodies were made.

A temple is also a symbol of the human body. The sanctum in the centre represents the soul, while the concentric quadrangles around—*Prakaras*—stand for the five sheaths of the soul. Many of our epic tales are also symbolical.

From the earliest antiquity through the Mauryan-Sunga 3rd to 2nd B.C. to the Kushan 1st to 3rd A.D.—Indian image-making craftsmanship kept evolving until the Gupta period saw the emergence of classical sculpture, the human figure in all its glory, with the rapid replacing of the luxuriance of wood by the grandeur of stone. One now sees the body covered with a subtler vitality, transforming the earthiness into an elevating inspiration by the richness it is given by the melting grace of the lines, making decoration almost superfluous. The throb of a clear lively emotion on so hard a surface is unbelievable. Even the most ordinary figures have the same exquisite balance, poise and vitality.

The dominant note struck by each figure is that of an inward power. The sculptor craftsman had to make the viewer conscious of this inward strength and the dynamism which was generated within and then flowed out of it, notwithstanding the immobility of the hard stone without. Once again the stress was on transmuting creative energy into *sadhana* (attainment) of harmony and peace. This meant it had to have the air of ease, poise, spontaneity, balance, all achieved through first the craftsman conjuring up the form through deep concentration, sincerity, devotion, then shaping it with delicate subtlety.

In some regions certain spirit pantheons are given shape in carved wooden figures for worship. A substantial collection of them are to be found in the Canara districts of Karnataka State. They are in a most unusual folk style of carving that has no parallel even in the same locale, for this area is rich both in wood carving as well as metal carving. It has the 1000 pillar and other elaborately carved temples of Jain inspiration as

also the 60 feet monolithic Jain figure of Gomateswara.

These figures are known as *bhoota* figures, because they represent a distinctive local cult of that name (literally, spirit of the dead). Their most distinguishing feature is their immense size, some figures rising upto 16 and 18 feet. The pantheon includes also a wide range of animals, all in their life size, even the elephant. The figures are in unusually bold modelling with elegant body lines, startlingly expressive faces, and intricately carved ornamentation. The craftsmen of that region, though normally working in classical styles of carving, can still reproduce with ease these straight figures which seem almost like from another world.

Craftsmanship began to attain almost unlimited dimension once architecture assumed a central importance. Texts carefully compiled in Vastuvidya and Vastushastras became the bibles for construction art and science. First the material used was wood which had a delicacy and allure of its own. Though most of this has passed away, what survives is of immense value both for its aesthetic value as evidence of the ingenuity of skill, as also scientific dimension and remarkable precision making for unusual stability and durability: each point that went into the structure was individualistic and had a special name, a simple yet effective method to avoid any error in the final assembling. Another characteristic of the wooden structure was the striking purity of its proportions. You could not change it by a millionth of an inch without marring its perfection, and no matter what its size, it had the air of lightness.

Some of the earliest examples of the high quality wood work in houses and temples can still be seen in Kulu, Kangra, Chamba, Kinnaur in Himachal, also in Kashmir. Top storeys of these homesteads have balconies intricately carved in individual panels, all combining to form a rich panorama. There is deep raised work on the doors and windows. The wide prevalence of fine wood-carving in even a later period can still be seen if one just walks down any old city. There are rows of houses with a long succession of carved doors and pillars with very artistic workmanship.

One of the oldest specimens of wood carving is seen in the Karla caves in Maharashtra where the brackets are shaped

into lotus pendants and tasselled forms, provided with lateral supports carved as figures of horses or elephants.

Kerala still has some impressive palaces and temples. A unique style is seen where the framework of the roof comes clear down and gets planted in the ground without resting on a wall. It has firm support inside by tall pillars so perfectly spaced that they seem to evoke a current of rhythm. Here one also finds traditional craftsmen who do their own very pronounced style of construction, are equally adept in building the Dravidian style without one intruding into the other, which proves that those steeped in a conventional inherited style can also perform a totally different style with competence because of their mastery over the basic principles. One sees the small and delicate works along with the massive and majestic.

Some wood is appreciated for its colour like the Raktachandani, blood coloured sandal wood, or for their perfumes like the ebony black rosewood and the renowned faint yellow-tinted sandal wood. Both rose and sandal wood lend themselves superbly to involved and elaborate patterns, wrought by intricate interlacing of foliage and scroll work, enveloping medallions of deities, and a variety of details are blended with extraordinary skill, labour of infinite care and patience. An item that needs special mention is a whisk composed of fine hair-like strips of sandalwood.

Ivory

Ivory craft cannot be considered as a major Indian craft, nevertheless it has come to assume a very important role in the historical and artistic growth of the country. Like all other actual handicraft samples of antiquity, one turns for ivories to the Harappan products and finds that not only was this craft seriously practised, but that it occupied a very significant place in the natural craft development. This was partly because of its decorative properties, partly it could be beautifully used in jewellery and carved into an ornament. It thus became a material both of wealth and good omen. It could also be used in decoration.

Between the 7th and 3rd century B.C., many centres for ivory work were in operation as evidently the scope of its use had considerably widened. Objects made from ivory ranged

from household and toilet items to ornaments. It also proved a very significant aid in decoration, for ivory pieces formed pleasing designs when fitted into incisions in wood, transforming not only the wooden surface but also its value a million-fold. Vedic literature, and particularly the Aitaraya Brahmana, elevates it as an art of the gods. Buddhist scriptures specially round the 6th century B.C. like the Vinaya texts, the Nikaras and the Jataka stories elaborate on ivory work covering the entice operation from tusk collection to the finished product. Trade transactions such as export are specially described for ivory articles seem to have been in heavy demand.

Descriptions on the use of ivory in palaces range from Ravana's palace to that of Darius I of Iran. They tell of ivory doors, windows, seats, legs of bedsteads, altars, images, etc. In the Maurya period, Arthashastra tells of careful cultivation of deep forests to breed elephants for ivory. During Chandragupta's and Ashoka's rule, ivory carvings reach noble heights, particularly in the shape of plaques and bands with large figures in high relief, and other excellent examples. From the Sunga period onwards, it spread wider, away from the boundaries of the royalty and the elite to the people at large all over the country. The items now moved to domestic and ritualistic needs and from the throne to the palanquin.

The Kushan period took ivory objects into a wider area with the opening of the great Silk Route linking India with Central Asia and the West, particularly Rome. The arrival of ships further expanded foreign links. It is therefore not surprising that an ivory mirror handle with an exquisitely carved figurine was discovered in ancient Pompeii.

The Gupta period saw the emergence of high-grade ivory sculpture, beautiful figures of Buddha, later followed by the various Hindu deities. Lathe turned furniture was popular as also the delicate items like seals and the popular chess pieces that still hold sway. Kamasutra and Brihatsamhita narrate the splendid success story of ivory craft.

The Mughals bestowed keen attention on this lovely material and large numbers of ivory carvers were directly employed by the royalty, as related by Jehangir in his memoirs.

Novel items also came to be made, like woven ivory mats, ivory fans with open work patterns delicately executed, pictorial cards with exquisite traceries, book covers with geometrical patterns.

Ivory is also decorated by painting designs on it like on wood, to produce elaborate scenes like the durbar, garden landscape, portraits of Kings and Princesses, etc.

The Vijayanagar Palace had one room built completely of ivory, the pillars and cross beams gorgeously carved into a variety of flowers. An equally impressive example is the three-tiered stupa in Bengal with columns and canopies adorned with fifty-six figures of the Mahayana pantheon.

A spectacular example can still be seen in the Darshan Door of the Golden Temple at Amritsar as also the door at Gan Mandir at Bikaner, palaces in Udaipur, Jaipur, Mysore and many monumental buildings all over India, heavily ornamented great pieces of art.

That ivory was widely used and prized is proved by the fact that the wooden pulpit in the mosques of Qous, Ebn Toulon, Nesfy and Queycoum of Cairo are inlaid with ivory in elaborate floral and geometrical patterns which closely resemble the Indian ones.

Stone Craft

Harappa has bequeathed to us quite impressive examples of stone sculpture, a typical one is a male torso in red stone in which the limbs are separately made, then fitted through the socket holes down the neck and the shoulders. The other statuette is of a dancer. So historically, as revealed by excavations, high structures and carved stone figures existed more than 3000 years back. A well-developed and sophisticated for that age urban life prevailed in large populous cities, built according to grid plans with an efficient drainage system, public baths, giant granaries, vast edifices for public use, all of which called for special building techniques, a high level of artistic ability and efficient civil administration.

In modern historical terms however, the stone craft starts

with the Mauryan period which initiated the transitional period of the change over from wood to stone. Judging from the early stonework, it seems to have been smooth, more in the nature of a translation from one medium to another, with just a change in tools, but no schism. For the same basic principles underlay craft production, the same objective and purpose behind the performance continued to govern the performance with the same sense of ultimate fulfilment.

The Mauryan era is known for its monolithic columns mounted at the top by magnificent animals, which Asoka used for inscribing Buddha's wise sayings, throughout his empire. Construction stone work in truth started with rock-cut caves going way back to the Buddhist era with their origin in Buddhist monasteries which were great seats of learning. A long tradition in rock-cut temples, Chaityas as the Buddhists term it, lead to rock-cut sculpture which attained colossal proportions in size and decoration as at Ellora and Elephanta. The cave areas grew so vast, Ellora for instance is about a mile long, that pillars had to be introduced for interior support. This feverish expansion resulted in scooping out several storeys, as they were converted into Viharas, dwelling cells for monks, and naturally with plenty more detailed ornamentation. Each storey for instance was differently beautified. These caves hold an unbelievable wealth of sculpture with increasing finery in decoration : striking figures with natural ease and graceful line, presenting a total effect of rare elegance. Every religious community seems to have poured out its creative wealth into these magnificent complexes. Thus, there are Buddhist, Hindu and Jain cave temples.

The Sunga period marks the adoption of stone and brick in construction work. The best stonework of this era, mainly Buddhist, is seen in Barhut, Sanchi and Buddh Gaya in the north. Interestingly, Sanchi shows clearly traces of the transfer from wood to stone carving. This is where the delicate fingers of the ivory carvers sent the chisel lovingly over the hard stone, offering their priceless gift of superb craftsmanship to the great teacher, Buddha. Side by side are also shown a panorama of common scenes from current life in bas reliefs and carvings. The striking feature about them is the liveliness reflected in the human figures and the pleasure on their faces, while each

is in a different pose or position displaying what has been defined as fearless happiness. No more the severe monist temper of the early Buddhist days. Here one sees also elaboration of nature spirits like the Naga serpent kings, mother earth, and in particular, Yaksha kings who are said to be guarding the four gateways of the world. Even more refreshing are the beautiful Yakshis.

The Yaksha and Yakshi so familiar in Indian arts and sculpture are rather a mystery. They obviously stimulated Indian artists enormously judging from its profuse presentation. One theory is that this unusual form proved arresting with sculptors and public alike and therefore lent itself to play an important role in image making. Buddhism, fundamentally opposed to image worship was relenting and in a mood for a deified figure, to satisfy those needing a more personal devotion. It is presumed this is where the Yaksha filled a need. He lived in the deep woods with his mate the Yakshi, and could become a divine personage. The Yaksha-Yakshi, though a cult, would have enjoyed a higher spiritual status as filling a void until Buddha himself came to be worshipped directly in his own right.

The gateway at Sanchi was executed between 70 and 50 B.C. under the patronage of Andhra kings. It depicts in relief scenes from Jataka tales of Buddha's former lives. These are very earthy and show complete picturisation of the diversities of Indian life of that period. There are riders on horses, elephants, dancing figures of women with lavish jewellery and heavy hair styles : winged animals, horned griffins with wings, even mini dwarfs. This work on the arches has a lyric beauty, delicately executed and judged amongst the best in stone sculpture.

That this was in the early Buddhist days is obvious from the complete absence of Buddha himself from the scene. He is indicated only by symbols:the umbrella, wisdom tree above all the sacred feet. 'Master has left this world and us, but he left us his footprints', said the followers.

This tradition continued down south in Amaravati also around 2nd century B.C. When Buddha became an object of worship, his figure started playing a very dominant role in the

development of images. In India the seated Buddha gained a grip. Evidently this figure held an intimate association to the Indian mind, the ideal of great discipline and the attainment of ultimate liberation. Buddha in this pose seems to have given a concrete form to the concept of a human in deep meditation transcending into the world of the Spirit, the Yogi so vividly described in the Bhagavad Gita.

The pre-Kushan to the Gupta era, i.e. from 1st century B.C. to 3rd century A.D. saw the rise of the illustrious Mathura school of sculpture with large quantities of figures as also varied stone objects. This marks a higher level of artistry attained in sculpture effecting a distinct transformation. One sees an idealistic modelling, a more delicate chiselling of the human figure, moving from the earthy to the sublime. In addition, the Gupta sculpture generated tremendous force in the creative world, besides its delicate aesthetics.

The superior workmanship of Mathura and Sarnath is also reflected at Amaravati, for one recognises that same lacy delicacy so distinctive a feature of Sanchi. This has in fact been called the flower of Indian sculpture. No matter what the object was, the modeller poured life into it. He applied his heart with a sensitivity, as though his vibrant fingers were handling soft pliable material with which he could play about in a carefree, creative spirit.

The stone craft was often shot through by a mood of emotional abandon that made the object produced pulsate with life and warmth, which projects even a transitory mood. Nevertheless, the element of stern discipline lent purpose and dignity to every operation, so that it became related to a more fundamental mission, not to just a passing everyday need. No matter how massive in bulk or colossal in size, complex in character with a myriad details a figure or a monolithic structure was, it had the same dynamism and moving quality which Indian craftsmanship has laid claim to through the ages.

The reliefs with narratives have a quality all their own. They are not limited to just telling a story or describing an incident. The figures speak much more, revealing deeper feelings and very pronounced aims in their attitudes, with an air of maturity that clothes them with a more sombre mission, as though they had weightier messages to convey.

Early Buddhist art was the work of people who wished to glorify Buddha through these sculptures. But medieval Buddhist art is the work of Buddhist monks deeply moved by the creative urge. Their workmanship is far superior, with deeper relief and the compositions more sophisticated, the sense of perspective and depth more convincing.

The Jain structures also have many railings and pillars decorated with motifs, some of people and some of nature with equally fine carving. In fact, the Jain stupas show a close identity with the Buddhist.

The magnificent stupa at Amaravati in Andhra, perhaps shows stone sculpture at its height. The 600-foot railing consists of pillars heavily decorated especially by the lotus. It is an extraordinary sight to see the 17 thousand square feet of space full of sculptured relief. The superb workmanship of Mathura and Sarnath is reflected here with that same basic delicacy, so distinctive a feature of the carving of that period.

The Orissa Kalinga temple style started in the 7th century; Rajarani temple, dateable to around the 11th century, is an example of a unique experiment, with its *shikhara* clustered by miniature repetitions of itself: it is also noted for its richly ornamented sculpture of excellence. Lingaraj temple is the high watermark of this style, with imposing figures of fine modelling. An intriguing sight is of one row of graceful female figures in most alluring poses with a lower row of Yalis—mythical lions. One also sees grieving dwarfs. The edifice itself is most complicated structure and because of its masterly planning, impressive dimensions, exquisitely designed friezes of elaborate scenes, it is considered a masterpiece.

Konarak is conceived as a gigantic Solar chariot running on twenty four gorgeously ornamented wheels driven by seven rearing horses. The sanctum has superb images of the Sun God. The roof is made of horizontal tiers with life size female sculptures of matchless delicacy and charm. The whole is surmounted by stupendous crowning members producing a picturesque contrast of light and shade. There is a sublime air about it, faultless proportions, harmonious integration of architectural grandeur balanced by soft elegance.

Khajuraho temples, now world renowned, are in the Chandella style, a central Indian dynasty of that name of the 10th century who proved to be great builders. One of its chief features is its extra high basement of ornamental moulding that seems to hold the structure in its grip. The *sikharas* clustered together clothe it with an unusual vertical quality and rhythm. The interior displays an exuberance of sculptural wealth, particularly the female bracket figures which are counted amongst the masterpieces of medieval sculpture.

Bengal temples have pleasing forms and a primeval folk vigour, simple curved roof representing it is presumed the original thatched roof. They display a wealth of moulded brick work and terracotta sculpture described as *panch ratna* and *nava ratna*. They have distinctive modes of planning and grouping of *sikharas* in tiers of five or nine.

Masrur in Kangra has sandstone cut into a series of temples, unique for that region, boldly carved out of a free-standing rock.

Further South had developed its own independent trends and styles. The cave sculpture of Mahabalipuram is superb and delineates a love of art and life in its wide sense at its best. In the seven caves, or pagodas as they are called, one sees besides epic scenes and deities, all living creatures, birds, beasts, men, gods, in a totality of creation, in a joyous, harmonious mood. The sculptural uniqueness of this relief lies in its continuing to remain an integral part of the rock itself, as though every object depicted was lifting itself subtly above the rock surface. It has an aura of that eternal quest of the spirit, the persistent motive behind all creativity, progress.

A remarkable feature of the southern temple carvings is the presentation of animal and bird life, profusely woven into the compositions. Very startling however are a number of ludicrous comic scenes with no sense of profanity provoked. There is an amazing figure of Arjuna standing in the traditional penance pose on one leg, and beside him, a caricature of a cat in the same pose with its paws raised in deep meditation, with its own share of an admiring audience in the shape of teeming mice ! Though in a modern sketch-book it would be a caricature, here it is so superbly done as to make it almost a classic. There

is another comic figure of a stag scratching its nose with its hind leg. Very arresting is a buffalo chewing the cud and the mouth seems to be actually moving. There is composite picture of a big duck, a monster lizard, fowl, spider, all ranged alongside with the larger majestic lion, elephant, horse, etc. The meticulous attention paid to the anatomy of each animal and the manner of representation proves the carvers' intimacy with the animal world.

There are thousands of other impressive temples all over the South. Srirangam may be mentioned, with a stone pavilion supported by thousand pillars, each elaborately carved out of a single piece of granite :two of the pillars are shaped as mighty horses, their pulsating vibrations almost visible. The other temple of Meenakshi at Madurai has the typical towering giant pyramidal gate-way known as Gopuram, with slender, fluted pillars forming a kind of orchestration, for each brings out a different melodic tone when struck. There are other unusual features like monster Yalis, pendants of huge single or double headed Garudas with spread out wings, etc.

One may sum up and define loosely the Dravidian structural craft as exemplified in the numerous temples, among the picturesque gate-ways consisting of a succession of rising pyramidal shapes, pillared walls producing a grand effect, heavily ornamented with deeply cut sculptures drawn into strong relief; exquisitely shaped canopies (*mandapams*) or halls for cultural events with elegant colonnades. Each of these then branched into different styles. There could be few parallels in such elaboration and variety.

There had generated by now a continuing reaction between the stone workers and the stone. They were undoubtedly elated by this new medium, chiefly because of its strength and a sense of relief that it was not easily perishable. The inspiring work seems to have stimulated increasing structural work and therefore more sculpture. This in turn led to providing greater scope and wider berth for the craftsmen. Out of their finely chiselled work comes a breath of greater vitality, rhythm and fluidity as though some sort of a symphony had emerged between the genius of the craftsman, the stone and the creation.



A craftsman at work



A model curved out of Pith



Designer lamps and



*Craftsmen displaying
their bamboo and
cane products*



her artefacts on display

A craftsman giving finishing touches to his product



Women artisans making wooden toys

Metalware

The beginning of metal craft seems lost in the mists of antiquity, for references to mining of metals dates back to 1500 B.C. One of the tribals, Aggaras, were experts in metals which takes knowledge of metal even further back. To this day there are large numbers of tribals who continue with this type of metal casting known as 'cire perdu' (lost wax process). Currently one can see in Kutb Minar the fascinating iron pillar in Delhi and the beams of the Konarak Sun Temple in Orissa, the daring yet successful use of iron by Indian craftsmen. Similarly, wrought iron went into implements. Matsyapurana, one of the ancient epics, describes the use of a long range of alloys obtained by varying the combinations and compositions of metals to meet different requirements, like brass, an alloy of copper and zinc, and bell-metal, a mixture of copper and tin. The high quality steel made in India reached out to many far off lands. That Mohenjodaro could yield a fine finished figure of a dancing girl in the 3rd millennium B.C. only emphasises the high degree of achievement attained even at that early period, showing intricate patterns and elegant designs, demonstrating the use of the 'cire perdu' (lost wax process). Two copper figurines discovered later display equal grace. The hordes of metal objects unearthed show the same high level of workmanship, especially in copper and gold ornaments.

The Gupta period, around 4th century A.D. to 750 A.D. excelled in the casting of images in various metals, especially large-sized ones like the colossal Sultanganj copper Buddha, cast in two layers. It stands as a landmark in India's long and splendid history, when all types of metals were converted into sumptuous products of superb aesthetic quality with infinite details, through the 'cire perdu' (lost wax process) which could bring out the minutest details of work. It had by now been incorporated into the Silpa Sastras as one of the standard methods. Whether large or small, the Gupta forms were elegant and trim, clad in dreamy, diaphanous robes clinging to the body, full of vitality and grace. Bronze, a combination of copper and tin seems to have taken over as the dominant raw material for images. Various metals like *ashtadhatu*, a combination of eight metals, or *panchaloha*, an amalgam of five metals, were used to signify the cosmic relationship of the image.

One sees delicate moulding, simple grace, shy allure in all metalware whether it be imagery or other objects. Vessels were in exquisite shapes of all types from cooking pots to flower vases, jugs, plates. A picturesque item is a water pitcher made in the Himalayan foothills, with parts in brass and parts in copper, the two colours blending to create a rainbow glow. In all these one sees the main emphasis on perfect line rather than on ornamentation, for that is where the real genius of the artist comes out. Facial expressions were more suggestive than pronounced as to stimulate one's imagination. All objects were in fact off-shoots of a single creative force of excellence in metal craft. The same genius that expressed in the giant figures, also flowed out into the tiniest toy.

The most alluring and striking objects in metal are toys, profusions of them, each region producing its own special ones, but showing the same all-pervading genius in a million different forms and expressions : humour and solemnity, love and fear, the slow crawl of a tortoise, the lightening speed of the bird, all part of a single universe of wonder. Among metal objects, lamps of all sizes and shapes, show masterly minds, shaped as flowers, animals, birds and humans and which are counted among the finest pieces of sculpture. In bronze casting there was hollow as well as solid casting, showing high artistic and technical skill in both.

The basic principles in image making remained the same through the ages inspite of the changes in the raw materials used, only displaying with time greater variety and proliferation, but equally impressive in their ingenuity and glamour. Signs and symbols grew to denote complex characters, attributes, qualities and to distinguish each form. Multiplicity of the heads and limbs, combination of man and beast, man and bird, etc, are examples of this. They showed, in fact, a kind of fresh vitality. For instance the powerful figure of Nataraja, endowed with extra arms, is designed to convey not only a strident pose, but equally power and strength.

This ancient imaginative complex imagery came nearer to abstract art which expresses the artist's search for a synthesis, a continuity of thought and action on more than one level, expression of a compound personality functioning in more than

one place. The ancient Indians solved this by creating three worlds, with multi-limbed figures operating in these different worlds.

One must, however, acknowledge that these complicated figures, notwithstanding their unusual form, satisfy one fundamental principle of good art, the basic unity of the total form. However diverse the various arts may seem, they are not divorced from the main composition, nor do they seem incongruously stuck together. On the contrary there is a sense of all the parts merging to form a harmonious unity.

It is not unusual to find alongside with solemnity vivacious, humourous figures with mischievous expressions like in stone sculpture, giving the compositions a warm human touch as though to remind us we are part of an earthy world, of a heterogenous social milieu. In course of time, however, metal casting became finer and ornamentation more lavish.

In the 9th and 10th century A.D., these influences travelled to different parts of the country, undergoing subtle changes in the different environments, though they retained the original human quality.

In the north-eastern region, particularly in Bengal, the Pala Kings patronised metal casting. The style changed and the figures became freer from the old set pattern, the faces sharper in outline, aquiline noses, crisply chaste lips and down cast meditative eyes. The flimsy fabric on the body was replaced by heavy jewellery. Now the presentation was in the form of intricate compositions of several deities together. The stele image, characteristic of the Pala art, developed like a vertical *sikhara* temple. This style is said to have exercised some influence on the bronze sculptures in Nepal, Tibet, Burma and Thailand.

In the south, sites such as Amaravati, Nagarjunkunda in Andhra, Akola in Gujarat and Brahmapuri in Maharashtra have yielded bronze images in the great Gupta quality, emphasizing a uniform concern and zeal for good craftsmanship in metal casting.

Independent innovative styles in metal work were blossoming out in the South from the 2nd century B.C. to the

3rd century A.D. Chalukyan and Rashtrakuta patronage encouraged high artistic and technical perfection and this aesthetic influence spread as a force in large southern areas, resulting in architectural masterpieces in the form of temples in Belur, Halebeid, etc. Here one saw perfect combination of stone for the body and wood for doors, windows, frames, in classical excellence. One recognises the wondrous celestial animals of Chalukyan origin in friezes of elephants, lions, horses, ox and Garuda, swan, goose, winged bull, etc.

The Pallava dynasty in the South made its own contribution through metal works of flawless purity, chaste forms, ornamented with sensitive motifs, and the themes treated with tenderness. The Cholas carried the metal craft on to a new aesthetic dimension, clothing the images with a rare dignity and splendour. It was they who raised the homely metal lamp into a piece of classical sculpture so that a Deepalakshmi is as much prized as a Nataraj.

The Vijayanagar style had elements of the earlier tradition, judging by the elaborate drapery and some of the set patterns. These burgeoned out into sumptuous shapes with all the ingenuity and glamour the Indian metal craft had by now come to acquire. The features of the sculpture are however distinctly different with sharp lines, face slightly grooved, eyes prominent, being wide.

The most important stylist element in the classic Dravidian image is the linear arrangement of every form, each a composition of smooth flowing rhythmic curves and a central focus into which all these elements got interwoven. There is an attempt to avoid or soften sharp angles or abrupt curves so that an overall smoothness and harmony is maintained.

In the growing complex of the super master-craftsmen, side by side with the *sutradhar* was promoted another master-craftsman of very high calibre, the *stapathi*, sometimes described as a kind of a 'director-general'. The book on construction, *Manasara*, endows him with almost a superhuman origin as a direct progeny of one of the original divine architects, probably to elevate his status. His pre-eminent position is emphasised in the *Silpa Sastra*, while the *Matsya Purana* is more explicit in describing the high qualities he is

expected to cultivate, such as honesty, modesty; industriousness, and, the last if not the least, ready wit. May be the last was added so that the weight of his virtues may not make the *stapathi* a dull and forbidding preceptor. The list of subjects that he had to master was also pretty formidable and ranged from astronomy, mechanics in use, mathematics, carpentry, metallurgy to painting. It was felt that the clear vision that is expected to conceive an entire grand design must also be able to master-mind its execution, a multi-faceted performance.

Textiles

Weaving is as old a craft as any other ancient one in India. Fragments of finely woven madder cloth were discovered in the early Indus Valley excavations which puts its antiquity to over 3000 years back. One of the Harappan sites yielded silk thread. Ancient Egyptians imported fine Indian muslins for their dead. Herodotus was all praise for the Indian muslins. The Rig Veda carries substantial details on the fabrics of that period. In the Yajurveda and Atharva Veda, garments are described. From 7th century B.C. cotton, wool and silk weaving became famous. Significantly the references to textiles are usually accompanied by stress on quality, like the muslin of Kasi is fine, choicest fabrics are from Bengal, Madurai fabric has delicate finish on both sides, etc. Books like *Lalita Vistara*, *Divyavadana* which describe the large range of fabrics in cotton, silk, wool, invariably emphasise their excellence.

Different types of textile materials are described in a number of our ancient texts with details under each. Some like Kautilya's Arthashastra even enumerate the different garments in use. The exuberant display of rich textiles on auspicious occasions is illustrated, like for instance, at Rama's Consecration the streets of Ayodhya were covered with silk sheets. Another reference is to marriage pandals covered by brocade cloth. The high quality attained is proved by Kalidasa's poetising over a cloth so light that it can easily be blown away by the mere breath. The location of the centres where these materials were made are also enumerated. Interestingly enough, most of the places mentioned in these texts still continue.

It would be hard to find any other craft described so profusely and in such infinite detail in the ancient books as textiles. From this one can but conclude that practically all the varieties in weaving, raw materials, the numerous techniques, the very wide range in enhancing the surface with ornamentation, have been there from the remotest times. From the Vedic literature itself one infers the use of decorative fabrics, as Indra is described as wearing a woollen garment for adornment. The texts for reference are many and very graphically detailed. *Vajasaneyisamhita* describes the making of embroidered garments. *Atharvaveda* mentions a heavily gold-embroidered cloak.

Equally exciting is the fact that such unusual and highly technical embroidery work like *durokha*—same work and pattern on both sides of a fabric—were in use; according to the *Sathpatha Brahmana* and the *Kathaka Samhita*. *Durokha* in muslin weave with two different colours on the two different sides was in vogue according to *Dighanikaya*. Kautilya, the famed statesman, praises the cotton weavers of Madurai as highly skilled, as also the wide range of items the craftsmen produced from very fine cotton yarn to the hefty massive ropes of hemp. So characteristic is this of the Indian attitude to workmanship, that it is immaterial whether the raw material be hemp or silk or gold thread, it was worthy of notice. The famous litterateur, Panini, also talks of the excellent textiles and garments. One cannot think of a single fabric, woven from every imaginable raw material from silk to hemp, every single weaving technique, every type of decoration, ornamentation which is still practised or can be seen in old collections, that does not find a place in these literary records. Not only is the fact of their existence amazing, but the very enormity of that achievement is staggering. It shows how highly stimulating was the imagination of those people, how dedicated and persevering the labours of the craftsmen, above all, the refined tastes and strict conformity to high standards. Craftsmanship was truly a way of life. Though production was on a galloping scale, two factors so much a part of our present commercial world, were absent. One is mass production leading to monotony; the other lowering of the high standard because of heavy demand and popular market. There are also descriptions of the many widely

varying items made from textiles, from canopies to robes, bed clothes, palanquin furnishings, saddles, swings, tents, carpets, etc. Almost everything in the world of textiles seemed ornamented, like beds decorated with gold fabric coverlets studded with gems and jewels. Megasthenes observes that Indians wore robes worked with precious stones and flowered patterns. The names of the different objects made out of fabrics as also the names of the ornamental designs are most picturesque, appropriately chosen with a kind of kinship with the subject they were related to. Sadly, space does not permit this exercise here.

Textiles have obviously been associated with social and ritualistic events from very early times and the universe has picturesquely been described as woven fabric. The garment became a symbol and added to the significance or efficacy of the object of worship. So the images began to be clothed in different garments for different parts of the day, which involved constant changes. There were also special clothes with special colours and designs at festivals for deities and man alike, to augment the wealth and variety.

As the early communities lived in close proximity with nature, their textiles were patterned on the local contours of the countryside. There is a blaze of bright shades in the desert area, while in the lush green region the fabrics get divested of pigments as though to let man enjoy the magnificence of the colours of the sky, water and forests. Where the landscape is brown and rocky, designs blossom out more boldly and richly.

Cotton fabrics were famed as most superb among crafts. Visitors from outside said that the weavers were like magicians who waved wands to produce dream materials. Naturally they were given fancy names like 'running water' because they became invisible when dipped in water and indistinguishable when laid on the grass, therefore called 'evening dew', and so light that it was called 'woven air' for even a five yard piece could pass through a little ring. Their weightlessness has been sung by poets comparing them to the moonlight or dew drop on the rose.

The weavers seem to have grasped the principles of perspective as applied to the range of colour by the mere

accuracy of their eye to fill in the shades without the use of ally instruments and simultaneously move their hands on the loom with mathematical precision.

They also seem to have developed their own science of colour blending in order to form a kind of harmony through regular or diffused or composite reflections. For instance some mixing of colours makes for contrasts and in a large composition this could balance with a harmonious concord and unity. The contrasts chosen may be steep, but not harsh, daring but not unsettling, with tender colours interposing. So when arrogant purple is thrown in with subdued green, so popular in India, the two seem to reach out to each other with a coy but poignant air. The extraordinary sensitivity of the subtlest shades can be judged from the fact that five tones in white are recognised, that of ivory, jasmine, August moon, clouds after they shed the rain, and the conch shell. The bold borrowing from nature has also made Indian craftsmen remarkably flexible in colour combination, and keep themselves free from the rigid codes which one time oppressed the West. For instance, pink and red were ruled as irreconcilable in the western world, but have been combined in India with charming effects. The craftsman's eye seems to swing between delicate undertones and strong overtones as from the youthful to the mature while a tonnal balance is maintained.

Beside the environmental influences which made for a vast variety in textiles, the very local social influences also contributed to the big range.

Amongst the distinguished Indian weaves are the carpets. While India has an old tradition of floor coverings, more in cotton for climatic reasons, the woollen weaving assumed a significant dimension with the introduction of the pile carpet by the Mughals. Though introduced as a foreign craft, today the Indian carpet is essentially a native of this country. When the Persian motifs were employed, a different rhythm and blending of contrast in forms and colours characteristically Indian came in to the carpets. The quality of sumptuousness which distinguishes this product vibrates more with the robustness of the Indian brand. The motifs have naturally only indigenous significance, like the circle as eternity, running water

as the rhythm of life, the *swastika* as the guiding light in darkness, the meandering line the continuity of life, the tree as bounty. Thus a carpet is said to be an emblem of life without end and the pattern the visible world of change. The carpet weavers being extraordinarily gifted, today can produce designs from any part of the world and do so largely for export. They are Indo-Persian, Central Asian, Turkish and even French.

Decoration and Ornamentation

Man seems to have been propelled by a continuing urge to cover a plain surface with ornamentation, be it clay, wood, stone, metal or fabric. Each of these ventures has proliferated so much that everyone has built up a craft world of its own and could fill a volume. Of striking interest are the principles governing ornamentation whether it be on metal, textile or wood. It was so planned and expressed that the ornamentation seemed like part of the object, as endowed by nature and not artificial embellishments imposed from outside.

In large urban centres where craftsmen from different parts may congregate, there can be fusion of more than one style. One sees boldness of form with delicate tracery on the surface, a carved panel with folkish scenes along with excellent modelling of figures.

Clay Craft

From earliest time decorative patterns were incised or painted on clay items. Apart from the millions of general patterns, there are special ones for specific occasions, especially festivals, auspicious events like birth, marriage, etc. Decoration is also done through various types of glazes, that endow a common clay piece with quiet magnificence.

Wood Craft

Wood lends itself to many more methods of decoration. The commonest is painting on wood, and presumably the earliest to enhance its uses, especially in constructions, as an adjunct to structural innovations. The forms depicted are ritualistic or geometrical, designed to sometimes effect a unique blending of

carving and painting to provide added attraction by focussing the curvatures into greater relief. There are a host of items : curtain figures for worship; small stools used in marriage have to have special painted designs, travelling shrines that have epic scenes.

Another type of decoration is plating the wood with metal, copper, brass or silver, done on doors, swing cradles, chariots and furniture. As the result of a special technique the wood appears as though it were made of that metal.

Most resplendent results accrue from lacquering of wood. Ornamental lacquering involving intricate manipulation produces a variety of picturesque effects. The most spectacular *nakashi* is done in Kashmir and Rajasthan when layers of lacquer in four different shades are made one over the other and the craftsman works out the design with a chisel, scrapes out the colours creating patterns which otherwise would be impossible. With this technique whole landscapes, hunting scenes, emerge projecting a wide range of objects with infinite details, like stalks of green leaves, multi-coloured flowers, figures ready and running amongst dense trees, animals creeping among bushes, portraying extraordinary skill and delicacy in the manipulation. Kashmir makes articles also in composite style, combining painting with lacquer, and, as no ground colour is given, the fine texture of the wood shows through the transparency of the lacquer varnish,

Punjab, Gujarat, Karnataka and Rajasthan each have distinct type of lacquer work.

Gujarat is noted for artistic furniture, gay with colours in the tin-foil style. Articles are also made in a golden finish with a transparent metallic effect with a flavour of enamelling in Gujarat.

Rajasthan specialises in zig-zag and dotted designs. The chief characteristic is that forms and colours alternate rhythmically.

Karnataka specialises in lacquer ware, toys and doíls, specially local figures in indigenous clothes.

Maharashtra is famous for lacquered fruits, vegetables and

nuts. Bihar specialises in ritual items, specially boxes used in marriages and festivals, each engraved with symbolic designs.

Orissa has a special box in bamboo or papier mache highly decorated with folk motifs traditionally used for exchanging gifts. It also has a special technique, *abri* which is produced by tremulous movements, resulting in different types of cloud scenes with shadowy effects.

Inlay : Inlay is done by decorating the surface of one material by setting pieces of other materials into it. The materials generally used are ivory, bone, metals, and various types of wood like rose, ebony, sandal, etc. This is an easy and simple work of artistry which with the skill of the workman can transform a single wood surface into a delectable ensemble of contrasts. From little items one can go on to large landscapes depicting ritual processions or pieces from the epics. This is done practically all over India.

Closely related to this is the marquetry work which is a kind of a mosaic. The designs here are wrought by laying on the smooth wood surface little pieces of other material cut in different shapes to form one grand design.

Veneering is also a form of ornamenting wood. Though this is done in many places, it is seldom on articles of everyday use. It had been greatly popularised through the Mughal time in making *howdahs* state chairs and items of very special use.

Ornamentation of wood is also done by metal wire inlay, mainly brass and a little in silver, known as *tarkashi*, largely from Mainpuri in Uttar Pradesh. Originally this was done on wooden foot-wear but is now widely used in all types of table ware furniture with great effect. It combines a sharp eye with a nimble touch and a sure quickness and unerring accuracy and dexterity in the manipulation of tools. Designs are formed by drawn wires or through dots which are minute coils of wire twisted up on the point of a needle, which when diversified run upto a few thousand within a few square inches.

The earliest specimen of marquetry is said to have developed in the 11th century in the Somnath Gateway in the Agra Fort. The earliest existing specimens are on the wooden canopy over Shah Alam's tomb at Ahmadnagar, handsomely

encrusted with mother of pearl. Work very similar is still seen for instance in Hoshiarpur, Punjab, where craftsmen still do carving.

Stone Craft

Stone is often rich in its own colour. The inlay is largely confined to white marble which no doubt is absolutely divine by itself, but its pure white surface invites ornamentation, for against this milky background the inset coloured stones form a multitude of mosaics. There are said to be 42 varieties in this setting. The designs are mostly floral, foliage intertwined with geometrical patterns. The craft is reminiscent of damascening, while the flow of lines and the flavour of the Moghul atmosphere. A wide range of articles are available in this material from trinket boxes to furniture like lattice backed settees, table-ware, household decoratives, etc.

The creation of rock-cut temples at the end of the 6th century broke fresh ground. The excitement of handling a new material stimulated the craftsmen. To begin with they carved out of the rocks the earlier temple shapes of brick and timber only with more embellished decoration.

There are numerous styles of decoration with stone promoted by almost countless rulers each in his own territory, the most characteristic being structures. Even in a single region there are variations. One of the types in Gujarat is known as the Solanki, under the Solanki rule whose grandest sample is the Sun God Temple in Modera, a majestic pillared edifice with an ornate plinth, embellished with lofty carvings dominated by images of the Sun God. Colossal Jain temples present impressive structures. There are the fantastic five hundred Jain temples in eleven enclosures.

The Cholas followed the tradition with greater maturity. The Brihadisvara temple at Tanjore dated around 900 A.D., an enormous complex, the body proper 60 metres, the highest for any temple, the pyramidal top soaring 16 storeys into the sky. A detailed description of a temple of this dimension with continuous corridors, more shrines than can be counted would fill a volume. Apart from its superb sculptures, it is a unique repository of various facets of art, illustrations of dance, music,

festivals, painted on the walls as well as historical events narrated in inscriptions. An innovation of this period is a special little temple to the Devi—Amman (mother)-as she is called. Even the old temples now each have this Amman temple added to it—as a regular temple, not just a shrine.

Islam had an impact on traditional architecture. Although the arch of some sort was already known in India, it was now a full blown form firmly planted. The flat lintels or corbelled ceilings were replaced by arches or vaults and the sphere by the dome. The exuberance of the Hindu expressions gave place to one more subdued. The lavish sculpture was substituted by geometrical patterns. Gradually the new architecture came under Islamic impact but something indigenous unfolded with its own method and idiom. The arch became a horse shoe, broad domes, recessed arches, perforated windows, arabesque low reliefs, wide use of red sandstone and milky marble. Free use of encaustic tiles lent colour.

Under the Tughluq dynasty, the new architecture attained a grace and restrained ornament and greater use of colour even though the ground remained plain. Kutb Minar with its projecting balconies carved with stalactite decoration, inscriptional surface carvings, is the highest stone tower in this country.

The Islamic style in Gujarat is perhaps the richest, promoted by the Khilji rulers. Their conception of symmetry and proportion blended with spaciousness, elegance and decorative designs introduced a new pattern and raised local architecture to an all time high standard as seen in some of the mosques. Small but precious, Rani Sipri has beautiful workmanship with tall slender turrets without stairways, marking a new innovation. The perforated screens of Sidi Said mosque of Ahmedabad have the shimmering feel of filigree.

Liberal use of glazed coloured tiles with floral, arabesque inscriptional rich designs created brilliant ornamentation.

The Indo-Islamic architecture reached its zenith during the Moghul period, largely because of the personal interest and patronage of the rulers. In the early part of this regime, Sher Shah of the Sur dynasty ruled for a while and brought in some

new features to brighten up the pale staleness of the past. The corners of the dome were held by pillared krosks and slender decorative turrets, and with the use of latticed screens, elegant merlons, ornamental fringes, medallions in the spandrels of arches combined to make it a splendid piece of structure. Amidst the enchanting black and white marble ornamentation is a unique *mihrab* obtained by the sinking of one recess within another to multiply the scope for further decoration.

These innovations kind of anticipate the Moghul pattern to come. Humayun's tomb marks the arrival of the Moghul style, for its definite synthesis of the Indo-Persian form.

The layout of Akbar's capital in Agra set a new pattern, a dream in lovely sandstone. A perfectly exquisite building is the Sleeping Chamber covered by stones chiselled in imitation of gorgeous tiles. No wonder this city, Fatehpur Sikri, has been called a gigantic jewel casket. Itmad-ud-Daula's tomb is one of the most beautiful marble structures, sensitively decorated with delicate inlay. The beauty penetrates into you partly because of its subdued tone and restrained air. The two monumental Jama Masjids are followed by the renowned Taj Mahal, which is a perfect piece of art. Its basic beauty lies in the perfect balance between structure and embellishment, the elegant inlay, all making it a kind of musical symphony.

Metal Craft

The attractive contrasts in colour and texture of metals has been the basis for the evolution of decoration on metals. Ornamentation may be divided into hammered, etched, perforated, pierced and repousse. Repousse or embossing work is done by raising the design in relief. Chasing is the art of engraving of a design on the surface of the metal with a blunt chisel. Decoration is done by punching, engraving, etching, etc. Engraving is probably the earliest effort in ornamentation, done by cutting or scratching lines. When the tracery gives a roughened or finely granulated surface to the metal, it is called frost work.

Punching creates a decorative effect by arrangement of lines and dots in a definite artistic pattern. Etching is similar to engraving but with thinner lines.

In decorative metalware a variety of pictures, even landscapes, war and court scenes, group dances, temples and deities can be depicted. There are also combinations of different techniques in a single object like a lamp with a perforated body and embossed stand. For fine engraving scroll pattern is used with delicate petal flowers. In the South, Tamil Nadu has a fabulous style of encrusting metal on metal. Three different craftsmen with three distinct types of skills collaborate in this performance. The base plate can only be prepared by a heavy metal worker, the reliefs by a jeweller and the encrusting by a fine stone setter. Of course, there are craftsmen who can do all the three processes.

Uttar Pradesh is noted for its coloured enamelling and intricate engravings in *niello*. Moradabad makes decorations in golden colour against a white background. These craftsmen do the most delicate art work known as *barik kam*. Delhi has spectacular lamps with perforations in lacy patterns.

Koftagiri is inlaying of a light metal on a dark one, technically known as damescening. One time this was mainly used for ornamenting weapons, armours, etc. Elegant picturisation can also be done in *koftagiri* as in Kerala.

Bidri is also a type of damescening with silver wire on a velvet black surface. This is one of the most attractive decorations on metal because of the lovely white brilliance of silver against a dark background. *Bidri* has probably the widest range of variety in design as well as the items of use. A whole lot of household items are made that include *hukkah* bases, furniture legs, betel and powder boxes, spoons, paper cutters, buttons, ash trays and goblets. Kashmir is famous for metal engraving and specialises in special articles like walking sticks, nut crackers, carving sets, cutlery, knives, *hukkah* bases and has been called the master craft, and in ornamentation it rises above others for its naturalistic perfection.

Enamelling is probably the most artistic way of decorating metal. It is the art of colouring and ornamenting a metal surface by fusing over it various mineral substances. The traditional form of enamelling called *eloisonne* has the design raised on the surface by using strips of metal or bent wire welded on to it. Where the pattern is cut out on the metal itself and the

design fitted in with the enamel, it is known as *champaleve*. India is supposed to have been one of the earliest countries in enamelling, even before China. It is done largely in Delhi, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. It is however best seen in jewellery.

There are some metals that are valued as precious, like silver and gold. Silver has been more widely used in India for special items. It has been used, apart from copper, in all ceremonial vessels, jewellery boxes, caskets, table ware, furniture. It is widely used in images for worship and medallions. It is popular also as elegant toilet receptacles, bowls for the sandalwood paste, sprinkler for rose water perfume containers. All these objects are artistically shaped, ornamented with designs or encrustation. A delicate style in this is known as silver filigree. This is made of wires joined together to form a delicate granular. It is then made into boxes, trays and largely for toilet items.

Jewellery

Perhaps no other country in the world has the same magnitude of jewellery as India. Traditionally it has been a part of Indian culture, a facet of its social pattern with deep religious overtones, and has to be viewed against this, perspective. Every auspicious occasion is associated with a special jewellery item. The first ornamentation starts with the piercing of the earlobes of the child to put an ornament, one of the earliest rituals. Tradition of wearing jewellery in India differs from that of the West, for whereas the latter has a central focus with the accessories to match, the jewellery in India is worn as a total ensemble. There is hardly a part of the body which is not covered by ornamentation. The earlier Indian jewellery and ornaments which come to us from the Harappan period show considerable development in the jewellery making craft. Atharvaveda and Yajurveda give descriptions of various ornaments. In fact there are a series of texts which describe various jewellery items. Many of these ornaments described in the text still continue in use. The materials used are gold, silver, copper, bronze, bell, glass with precious stones for ornamentation. Beads, conch shell, pearls, ivory, glass, different semi-precious stones were also profusely used. This belongs mainly to the period between

7th century B.C. and 3rd century A.D. Of the two books mentioned, Brihattsamhita of Varahamihira is regarded as the most authentic source for the enumerative description of ornamentation. Here we have very minute analysis of most of the items. Of course, many of the items were worn by both men and women. In course of time, the encrustation of precious and semi-precious stones on jewellery items has increased.

It is amazing how many of the old designs have remained unaltered through the ages, particularly in folk jewellery. This is the most distinctive, highly artistic, elaborate and varied amongst all Indian jewellery. For it has the vigour and sturdiness in style associated with the people of the soil and the beauty of designs borrowed from the immediate environment, from nature, and developed into artistic stylised patterns. Folk jewellery indicates the earliest items of ornamentation with seeds, shells, leaves and flowers, berries and nuts figuring more profusely. For even when the material used was silver or gold, the same jasmine buds were strung on a bracelet, or champak flowers for a necklace, or leaves woven to form a bird.

Though the basic items are the same for necklaces, bracelets, ear-rings, nose-rings, armlets, hair ornaments, like most other craft objects, designs are from the local environment and add to the sum total of the wide variety in jewellery.

Weaving

There are innumerable techniques to produce special styles and colour combinations as decorative motifs for ornamentation on textiles. One can only take a few that seem outstanding. Amongst the elaborate ones in cotton is *jamdani* which gives a tapestry appearance and combines rare finesse with white or coloured designs of great intricacy. The fabric shows shadowy figured designs, rather dreamy and suggestive. *Himru* is a kind of a brocaded material which specialises in designs from nature like flowering creepers or leaves with stems interlocked to form intricate patterns, and also a large selection of geometrical designs. Varanasi has the world famous brocade which produces endless patterns in silk, silver and gold tissue, the latter forming a shimmering cascade in brilliant metal. This

fabric is identified by spangles sprinkled over, a heavy gold border and the end in a variety of designs, with flowers, birds and animals.

Gujarat has *patola* in the *ikat* weave which is internationally known. Its speciality is that it is an ostentatious weave with figured objects and the subtle merging of one shade into the other. This style is done also in Orissa and Andhra Pradesh. *Tanchoi* is also a speciality of Surat. This has a satin base with the merging of the extra weft floats in the fabric. The common designs are floral sprays, flying birds or animals, some even have a whole hunting scene spread over.

The south has special patterns in cotton as well as silk that have become very renowned for the quality of the material as well as the beautiful designs. One of its distinguishing marks is the broad solid border where the wast threads do not enter into the borders. Very intricate designs are woven into the body, one of the specialities being temple towers along the borders.

Picturesque fabrics are produced in Assam mainly with tussore silk which is flat and not round like other silks, and this difference in structure endows the cloth with a natural brilliance.

In Manipur in the east weaving is universal and has built many a romance around its textiles as every process and design is highlighted by a legend. One is that when a weaver sat down to weave the royal design a gun salute would be fired in honour of it. The designs are very special and they rather resemble the *jamdani*. There is also a combination of weaving and embroidery for the design on the loom is taken as a weave, the unique technique makes it into embroidery, and the fabric is called loom embroidery. There is a unique design which resembles the grains of the wood as they are revealed when the wood is chopped.

In woolen materials the most coveted are the shawls which have of course won world recognition. Kashmir shawls are the most outstanding. The most complex *jamavar* is done by shuffling shuttles loaded with rich coloured threads which can go upto 50 in a single piece. The Himalayan region produces a large variety of shawls with complicated weaves to get a wide range of effects.

Besides decorating by manipulating the loom, several other methods of ornamentation have been invented. The earliest probably was painting on cloth, where a dazzling array of exotic flowers and foliage done through a complicated process of painting became famous as *coromandal chintz*. These designs have now been replaced by block printing which is very much simpler and provides the same design.

There are, however, a few places where painting on cloth is done, like Kalahasti in Andhra Pradesh where these fabrics are used as drapes and hangings in temples. In Nathdwara in Rajasthan the tempera technique is used again to make temple clothes known as *Pichwais* which also run into rolls of cloth and tell the different stories. Gujarat has the *Devi ka purda*, curtain of the Goddess; Orissa also has cloth paintings called *patachitra* where whole stories are shown on a long piece of cloth like a picture film. In West Bengal, the same type is in vogue in the form of scrolls.

All of these serve the religious purpose. Rajasthan has also one very special cloth known as *babuji ka padh* which tells heroic tales of warriors.

They are all done in free hand from memory or picturised from verses which they are taught to recite. They are completely folk in style and made in vegetable dyes.

Batik is another style in painting and its charm lies in each piece being individualistic and a fresh creation which have the scintillating quality of the stained glass, an effect which is only possible through this medium.

Bandhani, the craft of tie and dye, is in two styles, the first, *chunnari* with flowery motifs and animals and human forms. The other is *gharchola*, an elaborate form and used for very special occasions as marriage cloth. The extraordinary skill the *bandhani* workers display in the composition of the design with minute example of details and the endless colour schemes that are wrought and transformed as though by some alchemy compel ungrudging homage. Mostly women do the tying of the cloth into knots with a pointed nail for a special look. The variety is infinite for each village has its own speciality.

Hand printing is one of the most universal of crafts. in use

as revealed by the Mohenjodaro excavations. Even older ones have been found in tombs in Egypt. Printed garments are also seen in the Ajanta caves and on the walls of very ancient temples. Here, too, the designs and the techniques vary from place to place, and have been guided by the item the print is used for.

Embroidery is also very ancient as figurines dating back to 2,500 B.C. were wearing embroidered drapery. Similar embroidered textiles are also seen in the ancient Buddhist stupa sculptures. India has all the embroidery stitches known to the rest of the world as also its own local variations and innovations.

Kashmir boasts of some of the best embroidery for it is the child of the gorgeous Kashmir landscape and has variety in its richness as superb in its beauty. This is one of the areas where the *do rukha*, i.e. same design on two sides, is made and which we trace back to the Vedic period. Rajasthan has *pichwais*, a temple cloth also made in embroidery for temples as well as temple chariots. The *phulkari* of Punjab is spectacular for it creates a flowery surface curiously enough through a simple darning done from the back. Gujarat has also very lavish embroidery styles and produces embossed designs covering the entire surface. Embroidery in Gujarat seems to pervade all aspects of life : decorating the entire house is a ritual. A speciality of Gujarat are panels from ancient epic or romantic tales and through a special technique the objects seem to be moving because of a lively air around them. One sees the sun rushing off in his chariot, the moon racing, birds flying, processions, charioteers on the march.

The *kantha* embroidery of Bengal has a different setting for it is done essentially to use discarded fabrics particularly saris which are piled up and quilted. Even the thread for the stitches is drawn from the old borders. *Kantha* has limitless designs for every woman has her own inventions though some traditional designs may figure. The embroidered fabrics serve several purposes, as a warm winter cover, for wrapping books or valuables, pillow covers, and small ones for comb and mirror, or for a wallet. There are special ones for rituals, like the *mandala* with a hundred petalled lotus.

The *chikan* work of Lucknow is special for its delicate and

subtle embroidery done with white thread on a white ground. A shadowy effect is produced with flowery designs.

Manipur embroidery is not only delicate with intricate designs in unusual rich shades, but the technique of working itself is more elderly and regulated. Manipur is one style very distinctive, for the design is said to have been copied from the body of a legendary snake and carried a beautiful scaly pattern. Chamba has very fine work, the designs being based very much on the local paintings and it has been called a needle painting, with vivid and lively faces and movement of the bodies. Manipur is also famous for a kind of fathomless sense of colour combinations and their relation to design, which makes every single piece distinctive.

More spectacular embroidery is done with metal wire in gold and silver. Beads are also used to embroider textiles and provides the most effective device to transform the commonest material into one of splendour.

Similar effects are achieved by applique. Amazing sights are shown like gardens in bloom, water falls, rains cascading. Bold patterns are also made with the use of tapes which are stitched down in linear patterns and used in garments combining the embroidery stitch with applique. The overall effect is created by the use of a variety of textures. Applique work is also used for decorative tents, canopies, ornamented with stylised tree forms, juxtaposed animals and geometric patterns.

Chapter III

ART IN INDIA

“**A**RT IN INDIA’ and ‘Art in the Modern World’ mean two very different things”, says Anand Coomaraswamy in his *Introduction to Indian Art*. “In India, it is the statement of a racial *experience* (italics mine) and serves the purpose of life, like daily bread. Indian art has always been produced to a demand. The kind of idealism which would glorify the artist who pursues a personal ideal of beauty and strives to express himself and suffers or perishes for lack of patronage, would appear to Indian thought ridiculous or pitiable”.

I have followed in the description and analysis the common convention of labelling works of different periods by the ruling dynasties of that time as this would make identification simpler rather than complicate it by bringing in other qualifying labels. True these definitions no matter how convenient they may appear, may be misleading or now wholly realistic. For craft expressions are recognised as the experiences of the workers at a place where they happen to be working at a certain time. The chief characteristics of their output are largely the result of the needs and demands of the times. We know that in the prevailing ideology of that period, innovations were not attempted for the sake of novelty. Nevertheless, since creativity was purposeful, changes were inevitable to keep in with the moods and demands of the people.

The role of the dynastic rulers whose names still continue to cling to craft styles, is not to be ignored for that would be perversion of history. Certainly many of the founders of the dynasties did encourage and even personally involve themselves in crafts as has been already noted, and patronised a great deal of creative work in several fields of aesthetics. This was generally kept up or even improved upon by their successors. We have to admit because of the substantial evidence that the perpetuation of the dynastic names through styles was not politically motivated. While political and social decorum was observed, the actual pattern of functioning in the crafts world

precluded any undue domination by the ruler. The rules of the guilds prove the freedom and prestigious status enjoyed by the craftsmen, as also the voluminous inscriptions on the walls of the vast structures, where names of the craftsmen who poured their labour and talent into the edifice are engraved side by side with those of the patron and donors to the building through money and kind. Thus the exact contribution of each participant from designing to actual conservation, as some craftsmen were allotted only to maintenance, was carefully recorded.

Tradition was never meant to be static. The Aitareya Brahmana has a significant verse entitled *Charaiveti* which exhorts : Move forward, for everything in this universe is on the move. So, man should not be static, for staticism is death, movement is life. Moreover the vitality of a tradition persists only so long as it is fed by intensity of imagination : aesthetics result where the theme, expression and content are in harmony. Where they are at variance, the result ugly. Form has to exhibit this relationship or it leads to archaism. That danger is mitigated in a society where people live not by love of art but love of life—where art work is only a means to a definite end. Art was a basic element permeating all activities.

There are numerous comments and tributes by famous foreigners visiting or having transactions with India in the ancient days. Several of them have been recorded. What I quote here is not as a pat on our back but to show how our life style affected them. For instance, Pliny the Roman historian is most concerned by the currency drain on the Roman *Empire*, not just Rome, because of imports from India. He warns his countrymen as follows : "It is well worth for us to notice that India takes away from the Roman empire annually a sum of 550 millions of sesterces (two million dollars) for her wares supplied, which are then sold at 100 times their original cost". The Chinese traveller Fa-Hien, commenting on Asoka's palace, makes the following fantastic statement, "King Asoka commissioned a genni to build his palace. It is no human handiwork."

One of the earliest acts of the new government in India after the country attained its freedom, was to set up a national

board for identifying and development of crafts. It was natural that the ideal of master-craftsmanship with its emphasis on quality and excellence should be revoked and its reality made relevant. In place of the warm patronage of dynastic rulers, and the sustenance provided by the Guild, the new state regime had to step into the void. In 1965 the All India Handicrafts Board instituted National Awards to craftsmen. They were a public recognition of the talent, skill, above all creativity of the craftsman, expanded consistently over a period.

The Award is presented by the President of India at a gala function in the Capital. The best piece made by each winner is acquired by the Board for its permanent collection. The Awards cover practically all the crafts. Each citation stresses the contribution of the winner through his adherence and faithful devotion to the great tradition of master-craftsmanship.

India has been a land of crafts and craftsmen. In this book an attempt has been made to trace the growth of master craftsmanship in our country in all its manifestations—metals, ivory carvings, potteries, mosaics, shawls, muslins, stones et al.

The author Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay was a freedom fighter and a social worker. She set up Central Cottage Industries Emporium and headed a number of organisations including All India Handicrafts Board. Kamaladevi wrote a number of books.



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